베르논 맨저
생존기

Information

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Sometime after ‘Gates’ appeared in this world, humanity was divided into two: [User] and [ordinary human beings]
Lee-kyung was able to awaken into a user and choose a [Class]…but, in momentary misjudgement, chose to be a [Necromancer], the bleakest of bleak classes.

<The most shocking dungeon accident of all time ‘The Tower of Command,’ what’s the cause of the failure?>

Meanwhile, Lee-kyung, searching for strengthening materials for his skeleton servant ‘Lackey,’ was barely able to participate in a raid for [The Officer’s Tower]. In the accident, he falls down alone to encounter a hidden truth.

“Please, I’ll do anything….Please form a contract with me and save me!” (Lee-kyung)

–You’ll do anything?….

[Will you accept the ‘oath’ offered by ‘Seo Dawon’?]

–You will do your best to help me achieve my revenge. And I will do my best to save you wherever, whenever you are in danger. How about that?

[Initiating new contract with ‘Seo Dawon’]

Junior Necromancer Choi Lee-kyung and Ranker Mage Seo Dawon’s delightful revenge play!

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Chapter 0: Prologue

Prologue

At some point in the past, doors called [Gates] that contained [Dungeons] filled with monsters and stele inscribed with tutorials started to appear; various convenient facilities separated into districts called [Hubs] also appeared. (It was a bit like the first town you connect to on an online game.)

The overall presentation was similar to an online game as well.

As a ‘user,’ I can use skills to defeat monsters and level up. Equipment and Potions can be crafted from materials gathered from the dungeons.

However, different from online games, when you die, it’s really over. Despite that tremendous risk, the number of users heading towards the dungeons steadily increased.

Because, there’s money to be made.

And, it’s not as if the Dungeons were illogical calamities. Dungeons operated with specific rulesets and faded into and out of existence. Within a few years after the appearance of these Dungeons, laws, research institutes, and trade agreements were created to observe this phenomenon; they quickly melted into the flow of ordinary people’s lives.

Anyway, unlike the initial days after the Dungeon’s appearance, there’s no more people clamouring about the end of humanity. (There are still a few left, but most people usually ignore them).

Through the news, books, newspapers, and internet communities, Dungeons naturally became a freely discussed subject in most nations. Even

in the most heavily censored countries, the development of the internet had made it so that the diffusion of information about these Dungeons could not be stopped.

The reason for the Dungeon's appearance is still unclear.

However, even before the dungeons, humanity had still yet to puzzle out many scientific concepts. This event was also treated as a phenomenon in which humans have not yet pieced together cause and effect, such as the birth of the universe or the contents of the deep sea.

Capitalism also played a large hand in how quickly the world accepted Dungeons and the 'awakened' users.

Dungeons operate by allowing users with skills to test their mettle against monsters; being victorious would result in, obviously, level-ups and possible rewards.

Possible dungeon rewards include materials and items, but even if you were to only receive materials, you could collect them to craft into an item later.

Items gained this way are truly amazing.

A single-use ring that can heal any grievous injury, shoes that can warp within 1 kilometer three times a day, a sword that can instantly freeze whatever it cuts, etc… Unimaginable items have appeared thusly in this world.

Of course the rich and corporations frantically sought to buy these items, and the price for a user's service soared. Not only that…even before the appearance of Dungeons, internet streaming was a common activity….

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"Welcome, this is Berserker Kim Sang-yoon."

-[‘Sangyoon Villain’ donated 1000 won [1]]

“Sangyoon-ah! Aren’t you embarrassed when the word berserker falls from your own lips? You’re now thirty…”

“Sangyoon Villain…sir, Thank you for coming. Embarrassed? Definitely not, hehe….anyway, today is Tuesday so….yes! We’re gonna go catch Fire dogs~ [2] . Fire dog, HellHound! This fucker took about 30 minutes last time to clear, right? All of you who were angry would know, but last time I regretfully missed something…So this time, I’ll proceed with the goal of clearing in 20 minutes!”

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In this way, Users entered dungeons with a broadcasting team or recorded privately. Rarely, users streamed ‘live.’ Companies quickly exploited this situation by hosting these private broadcasts, and user-founded companies were soon born.

If before Dungeons children’s number 1 career choice were youtubers, afterwards ‘Dungeon user’ became 1st place, showing how fast one could earn both money and glory with this career.

Furthermore, the government would pay a considerable stipend to users willing to be affiliated with it. Among the general public, becoming a user became a dream equatable to winning the lottery.

So, when I was evaluated to be a user, when I changed my jobs and got my ‘Skills,’ I felt as if I was on top of the world. I called up even the people that used to ignore me, basked in the envious gazes and attention, and rewarded myself with a bottle of alcohol costing 1 million won…. [3]

Only after I set foot inside a dungeon did I realize that the world would not go easy on me. Becoming a user wasn’t 100% exactly like winning the lottery. It’s just… A man like me was worth as much as one of the low consolation prizes.

Those who can become someone, will become someone…but those who don’t have that “it” factor within them, won’t.

Why did I forget this obvious tenet of truth even after 24 years of living?

Footnotes

1. about 1 dollar
2. Mythical creatures thought to consume the sun during an eclipse
3. About 1000 dollars

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Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Name: Choi Lee-kyung – Lvl42

Job: Low-grade Necromancer
HP-32,000
MP-10,000

Title: Greenhorn Adventurer – tasting the bitterness of life!
(While using the title ‘Greenhorn Adventurer’, movement speed will increase by 5%)

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):
Magic: 228
Magical Control: 3.1%
Movement Speed: 22.7% (+5%)

Skill:
– Summon Evil Spirits

[Summon vengeful ghosts: Proficiency 0%,Grade: None.]
[Summon sacrificial offering: Proficiency 0.7%, Rank: Lowest Grade]

Summon spirits, through contracts, to serve as your servants. A spirit stronger than the caster may not be able to be registered as a servant, so be careful!

There are two types of contracts: Vengeful ghost summoning and Sacricial offering summoning. Pressing the button for each summon will start the technique.

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-Summon Low-rank Skeleton (1/1)
-Name of Skeleton (Lackey)

The initial registration of a name in the skill above cannot be later changed. You can summon without any restrictions, even if you are far away from your summoned spirit, if you call their name. (Cooldown time 1 minute 30 seconds).

-Command Servant:

Current number of command-able beings: (1/1)

('Lackey' currently has two main skills available.)

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I opened my status window, but then closed it with a sigh.

Then I looked upon Lackey, the low-rank skeleton, sitting calmly by my feet. As soon as our eyes met, it gnashed its teeth together with a 'clack-clack' sound.

"Lackey's Status window."

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Lackey – Choi Lee-kyung's servant.

Class: Low-grade Skeleton
HP- 2,500/2,500
MP- N/A.
Loyalty: Extremely high.
Disposition: Dark, Evil, Gentle, and Lazy.

Current Mood: '….Am, I suffering from spring fever?'

Durability: Infinite (If it is attacked for more than its total health, the skeleton will be reversed summoned back into Choi Lee-kyung's personal space, and the user will sustain the overflow damage. Re-summon Cooldown time: 24 hours)

Stat:
Strength +50
Magic +50
Stamina +100
Agility -20

There are no other special stats. (Stat changes of +/- 10 are not shown.)

Skill:

– Clacking: It can make some sounds. A low level of communication is possible.

-Bite: 'My teeth were strong even before death!' Your skeleton can attack the enemy by biting.

Evolution – You currently lack the materials necessary for evolution.

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Ha…….

I became a 'Necromancer.'

And, you can roughly tell just from looking at the Status window, but I was a stationary bowl of cold rice [1]. If you told any user that these were the results of 1 years' worth of dungeoneering, they would all be alarmed….because the growth rates were too slow.

This is all because of my class.

Before I can explain the situation surrounding my class, I should first explain how I became a user……

Simply put, every month the country implements a nationwide [ability distinguishing test]. Once you are judged to be suitable, to have potential, you can enter a [Hub] and register as an user. And, finally, at the time of registration, you have to choose a class available to you in order to finalize the registration process.

There are three classes available to be chosen during registration.

The jobs list will randomly contain classes that will relate, minutely, to your innate talents.

To be honest, it’s all about luck.

Anyway, once you choose a job, it’s all finished. At the time, I had no idea what would be powerful or what would suit me. I just had a vague idea, fueled by rumors from unknown sources, that ‘magic users’ or ‘healers’ would be treated nobly.

The classes that came up for me were Warrior, Alchemist, and Necromancer.

First, Warrior:

Warriors fulfill a combatant role, but are also known as a common class. Over 90% of users encountered it in their lists. Plus, I had no interest in melee combat classes. I already hate exercising; imagine running around in armor and carrying a sword….Anyway, I skipped over that class description.

Second, Alchemist:

I’ve heard briefly that making potions is lucrative, but honestly, who goes dungeoneering for the collecting-crafting cycle? I wanted to have a lofty battle class so I wasn’t willing to be an Alchemist either.

Behind them, the third on the list was Necromancer.

But, even from the beginning when clicking on the class description, I was already unsettled.

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[Class Description]

Necromancer:

‘If time cannot be rewound, you can just rewrite the outcome, right?’

You are the companion of corpses and the resentful spirits that wander the netherlands. Those who lived shining mortal lives, but, in death, lose their bodies and are left with hate and a thirst for the shining lives they lost.

Souls who suffered unfair deaths and hold grim grudges will appeal, groveling with lips on the ground, to you who have never set eyes upon these beings before. They’ll say, ‘It’s okay to be your servant forever, as long as you listen to our story!’

Introduction of class skills:
Class skills are automatically applied to all battles after class selection.

<1man army>

You don’t have to stress yourself and party up with people you don’t match. Whatever your servant kills, it will be resurrected as a zombie. Here’s a good idea: if you’re forced to hang out with someone you don’t like, why don’t you kill them and make them useful! (Enemies your servant kills can be used as part of your army for a set period of time.)

<Fear>

All living beings fear death. It is natural to feel instinctive fear and awe towards you who conquers and deceives death. (Attacking with a skill can have a probability of inflicting ‘fear’ status effect. However, this is ineffective on undead beings.)

<Friend of darkness and night>

When the sun sets, cowards hide, but for you the banquet begins. (Increases skill attacks by 10% when attacking in the night, shade, or darkness)

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So I chose ‘Necromancer,’ which seemed the coolest of the three options.

A message, [Wise Choice], popped up and I was handed a low-grade skeleton as my possession. I thought “Wow…what kind of car should I buy next month?” Like this, I ate my kimchi stew and grinned.

I named my skeleton ‘Lackey,’ [Ttakkari] at that moment. It was a name that advertised just how inflated my ego was…..

And then, 1 year after registering as a user…….

Those memories became dark stains upon my history.

Just a black stain? Looking back at all the fantasy novels I’ve read I had expectations, but seeing nothing but regression materials brings tears to my eyes . If only I could turn back the hands of time, I would immediately have chosen to be an Alchemist. Just thinking about how lucrative the Alchemist class is, I get so angry….at my past self that is.

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TN: Hey Guys, This is part one of a mini-mass release! The novel takes a while to get going (the first few chapters are spent world-building the classes and the situation) so bear with me!

Footnotes

1. An easy target

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Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Actually, it’s fine if the Alchemist class disappears and only the Warrior and Necromancer remain. A Warrior’s livelihood is never in danger. There are so many Warriors, politicians are conscious of them and write bills taking their opinions into consideration. The Warrior’s association is also good at supporting Newbies.

Ha…

So what kind of class is this ‘Necromancer’?

It’s a failure of a class that, unless a gun is held to your head, you shouldn’t take.

While delusional and receiving a skeleton, if I ….If only I noticed the ambiguous gazes of the Users around me…In truth, I didn’t afford any attention to anyone from the excitement of choosing a class, using skills, and observing ‘Lackey.’

To this day, one of the things I regret is not knowing about the forum community, [Ranking Gods], that many Users access. If I had, maybe I wouldn’t be in such an unanswerable situation.

Before I knew about Ranking Gods, I was an ordinary middle-class worker. Of course I was ignorant of combat and dungeon terms nor how to optimize life. So, I really scrambled to eat and live like a stray dog on the streets.

I wasted away half an exhausting year like that. By chance, I came across information on ‘Ranking Gods’ in another community of users, and,

that very night, I immediately applied for membership. This was what I saw when I first joined.

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<Telling you the real ‘god-like’ classes, a must know for prospective users>
Author: Grand Inspection

1. Priest

By chance, if you see my post before choosing a class, and Priest is one of your recommended jobs, you’ve really won at life. It hurts me to even say it, but the skills are like a scam. Even without entering combat, Priests have the easiest time making money.

It’s simple for Priests to earn money. There’s the halo skill, right? If you use that in front of a Dungeon, you’ll suddenly find a guy wearing tight black clothes or a guy holding crossbows or shields running, breathlessly, your way.

They’ll want to talk to you, to “propose.” You can close your eyes, they’ll try to carry you and earn money for you.

If you follow the highest level combatant and give them some buffs before battle: “Shield?,” he will immediately start crying and simpering….But, if you’re too lazy to put up a shield, you don’t have to. No one would dare have the nerve to demand this buff.

Maybe you’ve seen these types of posts around this community: [Priest was an available class for me, but I chose XXX other job instead because I didn’t want to work as a support. I don’t regret it. It’s better to choose a job that suits your personality.] Or [My Hyung is a Priest, but he says the Priest isn’t all that good.] You will often hear these sorts of opinions.

The template above may change brother to sister or friends, but it doesn’t matter. These types of posts all claim that ‘the Priest class is actually

insubstantial'…

Those bashing Priests are speaking nonsense.

This is important so I'll say it again.

If Priest shows up, choose it.

Of course, if you've rolled around in the Dungeons for a few years like I have, you'd know that all those who slander Priests have squandered the job. However, Newbies don't often get invitations to clear Dungeons nor have any personal connections. Especially, when they enter the Hub, they get swayed by groundless rumours–unable to separate truth from trash.

So, in order to prevent you all from the headache of being swayed by these rumours and choosing a mystery class even if Priest was in the list of recommendations, I've prepared this PSA. And, you should all believe me.

If you don't understand now, it's okay, just memorize this.

If the Priest class shows up think: 'Ah~ I'm someone who was given a more exceptional choice than others~ I'm a demigod~'

A Priest is not someone who only gives heals or buffs outside of Hubs. Coupled with the perfect buffs, real Priests within the Hubs can use offensive attacks such as 'Holy spear' or 'Purge' even from level 1. This class is truly favored by the gods.

Since party-play is necessary to leveling up, Priests have it easy. Who wouldn't want to covet them? In the same vein, it becomes advantageous in joining the top guilds and receiving their support.

So Newbies…keep in mind that if you want to succeed as a User, the easiest way is to become a Priest. If it shows up, immediately grab that opportunity.

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2. Mage

The Mage is almost as much of a cheat job as Priest.

Though, compared to the Priest, it does not have attack increasing buffs, the Mage itself, amongst all the other jobs, brings overwhelming outstanding offensive power to the table.

The introduction of the Mage's class, however, only has some vague head-in-the-clouds description; it would be easy to overlook this class and, regretfully not choose it…However, here I will give a vital tip. The shinier the system's description of the class, the more useless it is, so be careful. Don't be swayed by eloquent words.

I'll stop with the idle talk and begin to explain one by one just how much of a dirty cheat a Mage is.

First, Mages have no restrictions on learning skills. Of course, skill categories are divided into the four basic elements, but you don't have to worry over which skills to choose. It's not about careful picking and choosing, you'll have to learn all of them. Let's just say the more you learn, the stronger you get. Also, there's no particular risk to acquiring a lot of skills. (If I had to nitpick, the more skills you learn the longer it takes to rank them all up?)

In addition, you only need 'skill books' to learn skills. Therefore, theoretically, all existing spells can be learned and used. It is also one of the unique classes that get a skill (for free) from the Hub when you first settle in.

When you enter the Hub, the stele in front of the Dungeons, marked 'Tutorial,' will first catch your eye.

Without doing anything else, immediately go up to the stele and press [move] –> [move to library]. A strange hologram called the librarian will show up and hand you magic books on the four basic elements for free.

Once you've learned from those 4 magic books, you will already have 4 more skills than the other classes.

Even with just those 4 skills, getting to the 30~40th level shouldn't be a problem.

In the future, Mages can learn Warp and Windwalker, two buffs of the wind attribute, and make money that way. Just exploiting ads to rescue others: [will someone give me a buff] [Warp save please]. If you go there and cast the skill, it's 'game over'. You will have to raise both skills to the highest proficiency level, but, by the time you're level 30, the proficiency will have naturally gone up.

The second reason to choose Mage is that even without a weapon it's possible to attack. If you look at the Mage Status window, next to the skill explanation should be two buttons [Change to verbal] and [Change to gesture]. Pressing that should allow you to activate spells by speaking or making hand gestures, even without a staff.

Your weapon breaks in the middle of combat? For other classes, this would be a huge catastrophe. Mages, however, can just 'change' their activation commands.

You'll learn just how big a benefit this is when clearing Dungeons yourself. That's why some penny-pinching Mage users will stick to verbal/gestural commands until a certain level, collecting money. Once enough is gathered, they'll switch to a staff. This is another one of a mage's advantages: enduring a low-income lifestyle.

Third and last, not many say that they don't 'fit' the Mage class. This may be an objectively obvious claim, but in reality Mages report higher job satisfaction compared to the other classes. (Link: 'Korean User Research Institute 20xx year, Job perception survey results')

Furthermore, if you have dreams of becoming a streamer…know that in the top 10 most popular user streams, three are Mages.

Few combat streamers can challenge the visual spectacle of a Mage. The skills' effects are flashy, and they are versatile enough to cover all sorts of combat situations even if you are solo. No matter how hard the Warrior runs with the greatsword, it'll be seen as nothing more than a documentary, but the Mage can be like a Marvel hero.

This is not my brain's bias; even advertisers love Mages. The average advertising pay for Mages cannot be compared to other classes. (Certain users who are famous for their wind-based magic are four times as expensive as other users who have similar subscriber counts.) There's a lot of people who broadcast these days, right? I'm using this tip myself, *nod nod*.

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3. Alchemist

The last job I'm recommending is the Alchemist.

Alchemists, unlike the two aforementioned classes, are solely crafters. What I mean is that all of the Alchemist's skills are tailored to crafting and production. They have no combat skills.

Therefore, there's no enjoyment in combat, and public perception of the class isn't good. It's far from the glamorous image that comes to mind when you think of Users. No matter how 'cooly' you make your potion, you're still just using your skills on a flask and some synthesizing fluid at a desk. Thus, If I promote their earnings as top tier, I might face some backlash, you know?

Despite all this, why am I recommending this class?

That's because, more than any others, you can earn lots of money.

Nothing more needs to be said when you realize that this is the only class that produces the potions that are so necessary to Dungeon diving. This job can also be a good alternative for those users who find combat burdensome.

So, if you want to build up a sizable pension without taking an extra job, just become an Alchemist. Even when you're a beginner, you can get hired at a workshop and steadily earn 500 monthly. If you hire a Warrior or Mage with the money you have collected, you can easily get boosted to level 50's.

When I recommend this job, people ask, "But you don't have any skills to protect yourself?" At level 30, Alchemists can make golems. You can either ride on the golem's shoulders or board the room in its chest.[1] So, if you feel threatened, you can call your golem to retreat or to use it in combat.

A golem's performance is determined by how much money you can spend on it. It wouldn't be too much of a strain for an Alchemist who has endless ways to make money through potions, scrolls, and mana stones.

There are also many Alchemists who earn money through streaming. They film and upload videos of mixing together various chemical reagents and other ingredients. [Making the best strawberry-flavored potion (glossy-potion) ASMR] etc…there's a lot of demand for things like that.

Interestingly, Alchemist streamers often have more subscribers than combat streamers. I looked some up a few times, and I ended up watching as if I was bewitched. I can watch peacefully, like flowing down a stream?

Anyway, I've recommended three actual, current meta, top-tier classes. If this helps, please press likes~

*I'll receive all tackles [2], but ignore nonsense

*This is a personal evaluation from my 5 years of dungeon experience

*I'm a Warrior

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[Like] [Dislike]
Like: 13,333

Dislike: 51
Comments (Expand)

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King God’s Pension: My class is Kingfisher

┗King God’s Pension: But just how much money do the top-tier make?

┗Down: Far too much lolol

┗ OP: Actually, besides Mage and Priest, all the other combat classes only make enough to get by. That’s why I wrote up those two alongside other production classes for potentially high earning jobs. We’re all just trying to make a living, aren’t we?

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Master Calligrapher: Why didn’t you mention Kingfisher?

┗OP: It’s not bad, but it’s not top-tier

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Josha: Why are you just posting this now!!

┗OP: What class did you pick?

┗Josha: Bard TT_TT Ah!!! I had a recommended class to choose as well.

┗OP: It’s okay, Bard isn’t a pitfall.

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: But the golem…The highest available option for the golem, one that can even fly, costs 10 billion won….There’s only a few ranking Alchemists that managed to make a flying golem…Even the simplest 4-piece golem costs 1.3~1.4 billion…The Alchemist has to have high of an expense barrier to

put it in the top tier alongside Priest and Mage…You can't ever make a golem on a workshop salary T.T

└OP: But this class is the only one who has high returns, even for the incompetents at level 30.

└ : How do you save 10 billion by earning 500 a month? T_T The golem market bubble is so bad that the price won't go down…As an Alchemist, I don't like the popular pervasive image that alchemists are all rich. Even knowing the ingredients can only be used by Alchemists, rich bastards buy it all up to resell at a high price. Consequently, every year, potion prices rise…

└Haeha: @ ?Bullshit kek, Who doesn't know that the workshops are colluding to raise prices every year lololol

└ : @Haeha? Why are you cursing all of a sudden…?? Don't you understand that if the ingredient prices rise, the finished product also becomes more expensive? Are Alchemists supposed to do business in the red?…You're not even a gangster, what kind of logic is that…

└OP: @ Every class has an extremely expensive end-game weapon, 10 billion won for an end-game golem is cheap, isn't it? Also I didn't mean that the 500 salary from the workshops is a lot, but that Alchemists can get paid at least 500. Higher levels get paid more, and you can set up your own workshop.

└Divinda: @ Fact: Alchemists charge 20 million won per top-grade mana stone reinforcement.

└Divinda: thinking back to how I cried while paying, I can't help but curse lolol

└Haeha: @ Alchemists can make a few off-cut flakes in the workshop and gain a six-figure salary, but combatants toil for 5 hours every day in the dungeons to procure ingredients. Just because we raise the price of the ingredients a little, we're called gangsters?

┗see!: @ Whose idea is it that combatants are purposefully buying and raising the prices of ingredients that only Alchemists use?

┗Haeha: @ Two years ago, the primary plant ingredient for the recovery potion costed 120,000 won per kg. Now it costs 130,000 won. Back then, a single bottle of recovery potion cost 6,000 won…but now it costs 25,000 won lol Are you kidding me?

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Newbie1: Hello, I enjoyed your post Hyung-nim!! But, right now I'm choosing my classes…but none of the top-tiers mentioned showed up TT_TT. Warrior, Necromancer, Beast-master, which of these three should I be T_T I just recently suspended my choice and stepped out T_T

┗OP: Hm, well if you want to fight with your body, Warrior. (I've written about the pros and cons of Warriors before, here's the link.) If you like animals, Beast-master. I've heard that with patience, you can attack with tamed animals later on… But most of the Beast-masters eventually become too attached to their animals and can't stomach using them to attack??? If you don't pay attention to that kind of thing, it's okay; performance is okay too. If you've dreamed of playing with pokemons, it might be worth it.

Newbie1: Thank you so much T_T But, is Necromancer not worth it?? The description was cool;

┗Damhwa: @Newbie1 God-cromancer

┗Yeseung: @Newbie1 It's F-tier, kek

┗Lemonade: @Newbie1 I sincerely say that it's a fine class. Please choose it.

┗OP: @Newbie1 Never choose it…It's a class that has no future

Newbie1: @Writer Thank you so much TT_TT!

┗Seol-ah: @Lemonade Trash Bastard lolol

└Night Sea: @Lemonade <Famous Troll

Footnotes

1. Like a gundam!
2. personal attacks and criticisms

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Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Feeling anxiety from this post and all the comments, I quickly became a member of the community and searched for the term “Necromancer.” I read everything, from the old to current.

All of the latest posts were nothing but mockery, only the older ones had some analysis of the class….The more I carefully read, the darker I felt.

In particular, when I read the words of Hong Seungmin, a sunbae [1] who walked the path of Necromancer before me, I wanted to tear my head off.

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<Why is Necromancer an inferior class?>
Poster: Hong Seung-min

This post is a PSA. For anyone who believes they’ve become a successful Necromancer, validate yourself and write some tips. But I bet there aren’t any lolol.

I’m a Necromancer, and I’ve been a Necromancer for three years–this class is a mess. It’s not that I’m a bad User, I’m objectively stating some facts.

From the very beginning, the whole explanation of the class is a scam.

A partner to spirits, A friend of darkness and night.

By this description, you become a solitary ruler of the battlefield…Young Users who love anime or old legends may be tempted by that image.

(F*cker, that was actually how I felt). But I assure you, this skill's introduction is fraudulent.

I'll explain why, one by one.

First – One-man army.

Looking at this, you would think that if you could manage to just kill at least one enemy in battle, you can begin to grow a limitless army. But, the number of enemies that each servant can kill and convert is fixed by the grade of the servant. If you just kill anything and turn it into a soldier, it'll become a low-level zombie which isn't much help in real combat.

To make it easy to understand, the low-grade skeleton that all necromancers first receive, can only make low-grade zombies even if it were to successfully bite and kill an enemy. It's not one plus one….even if it were to bite many enemies, only one of them would turn into a zombie. Low-grades can only raise 1 zombie, mhmm.

Furthermore, the bitten and revived zombie will lack in ability. This will never happen, but if, for example, your low-grade skeleton bit and revived a swordmaster, the swordmaster zombie will only groan and move sloppily. He won't revive as the swordmaster he once was….

So, I've done various research….It turns out that the only way to maintain the skills and levels of the dead or monsters is to make a 'formal contract.' A servant can only kill and revive enemies into low-level zombie legions. It's not a horrible skill, but it's not a great skill.

2nd – Fear.

I don't exactly know what the set probability is, but after years of experiments, it rarely triggered. In my experience, in ten thousand times of using a skill attack, it'll trigger once.

Also, the fear effect only really works on opponents that are much weaker than the Necromancer. Stronger monsters gain immunities to Fear, and it

rarely works. What's the use if you Fear an easy level 1 slime anyway? It's putting a shiny coating on an absolutely useless skill.

3rd – Friend to Darkness and Night.

Now this is the real crux of the scam…[Increase skill attack by 10% in night, shade, and darkness]. You may think it's a good skill when you see it, but Necromancers are already naturally reduced by 10% in the morning and day, in bright daylight!

Not only that…I only once got together a party to raid in the middle of the night, and it wasn't easy. Users generally sleep at night and start to explore the Dungeons in the morning.

In other words, it's a perilous skill. It doesn't explain any of the risks and only shows the advantageous parts to deceive people. "System Messages" aren't supposed to be User-friendly in the first place, but Necromancer's are especially deceptive. Even if you're an ordinary person, just from what I've written, you'll know that this job is hopeless.

Lastly, Necromancers have no recourse to make money, but must instead break their bank.

A Necromancer's ability is determined by how many useful servants they can gather. Simply put, the more high-level servants, the better. The only way to get servants, though, is through making contracts, which are divided into two methods: [vengeful spirit contract] and [sacrificial offering contract].

The problem is that these two are particularly tricky to trigger.

I don't know much about [vengeful spirit contracts] because I've never raised a ranker-grade soul before…But, in any case, the contract requires a soul filled with grudge nearby.

So, to attain this type of contract, I pitched a tent in a cemetary Dungeon for 30 days. I deliberately checked into the hospital, wandered around intensive care units, and lingered in funeral halls, but none of this worked. Only

“Contract conditions are not met” windows would appear and it was of no use.

I can’t even understand how one forms a contract. I asked around to see if other Necromancers knew how, but not even they had any idea. There may be a bastard who knows and won’t tell me. Anyways, I’ve never gained servants using this method.

Next is the [sacrificial offering contract], which summons servants with materials. If the offering is properly prepared, there is a 100% chance of it working.

But, even getting the materials for an mid-grade Skeleton is very difficult and costly–a ‘mana stone’ will definitely be consumed. A low-grade mana stone the size of your fist is already priced at 70 million won on the current market. To summon an intermediate Skeleton, 10 low-grade mana stones are required.

So, ‘just go earn 70 million won,’ you say? Do you think you can take one Low-grade Skeleton and clear a Dungeon…Crush mobs? You’re more likely to crush your head.

Still, wanting to be successful as a Necromancer, I somehow saved money for two years and summoned an Mid-grade Skeleton. But… For the money and effort I spent, the specs were too inferior. Definitely not worth the money and the mana stones…

Furthermore, Necromancers can’t receive a decent amount of buffs. Perhaps because the concept of the class relies on desecrating the dead, any of the Priests’ blessings will not apply. Buffs or weapons of sexual nature cannot be effective either. Since a Bard’s ‘performance’ buff is usually of sensual nature, the so-called “Buff High” [2] is unavailable to Necromancers as well.

Any parties formed must work at night, Only Low to Mid-grade Skeletons are available for the beggars…Of course I can’t even dream about a fixed salary. I’ll fail all guild interviews; I can’t go to the Dungeons that are supposed to match my level… I eventually got to the point where I couldn’t even earn enough to afford potions.

So what’s left…

There’s a way to increase the strength of your original servants. If you look at the bottom of your servant’s ‘Status Window,’ there is a button to ‘Reinforce’ them.

But this, too, is impossible lolol

Because, no matter how I search auction listings or put request posts on the forums, the reinforcement materials they ask me to collect can’t be found. I’ve searched for any traces on the internet, but I can’t even find the data. lololol

So, I believe that these are materials that aren’t available from any of the current open Dungeons but are from Dungeons that haven’t been cleared yet. In other words, if our current progression is not advanced enough, the materials will remain unavailable forever. It’s virtually impossible to strengthen your Skeleton.

Conclusion: So I…after settling all my accounts during my time as a User…went and took a test to become a Police Officer.

I know there are <class reset scrolls>, but its market value is 200 million these days. I gave up since I heard that it’s not only just your class, but levels as well. Thinking of all the effort and sweat wasted, I felt that giving up was the answer.

Maybe it would be different for people who were born with a gold spoon… but instead of investing hundreds of millions into this class, just reset until Priest is one of your options.

No, just choose to be a Warrior instead.

Anything would be better than Necromancer.

I’ll summarize in three lines.

1. Don’t be a Necromancer

2. Not even if you’re rich

3. You won’t look cool. It’s a class where you’re dragging around weak skulls while shedding many tears.

End.

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After reading all of this, my mind felt empty.

He…for 3 years he tried to endure, but in the end he couldn’t afford potion costs and eventually became a police officer?

But, come to think of it, I haven’t really made money this past year as a User either….I’ve survived with the money my family sent along with the savings I’ve gathered in college. I’ve chipped away at that nest egg slowly; I couldn’t survive with the items I’ve gathered from the Dungeons.

My Skeleton (Lackey) is cute, but Hong Seung-min is right. He doesn’t have any attack power, and his only skill is to bite. Mob clearing has to be done one enemy at a time, by luring a straggler away from the crowd. Levelling is slow going since that’s a tactic that can only be used on low-tier monsters such as slimes and orcs

I thought about changing classes, but, of course, there was no way I could afford 200 million won. Besides, if I reset myself, a year’s worth of hard work will go down the drain…

I felt ashamed and wondered if I should give up being a User and take a civil service exam like the other Necromancer.

But….

“Yes, Mom….” I answered the phone.

–Aigoo[3], is our son doing well?

“Yeah…..How about you, mom?”

–Momma’s doing well….You’re eating and living well, right?

“Yeah. I guess….”

–Why do you sound like that? Should I send some allowance?

“You don’t have to! I didn’t call to ask for money…”

–Then, did something happen? Did you get hurt in the Dungeons?

“No. I have potions, I’ll be fine… How are you lately, mom? Doing well?”

–*Sigh* You know I went to the hospital last time, right? The doctor says that he’ll need to run more tests.

“Ahh….Yeah. How was it?”

–Well, it’s the same as always… He wants me to retire. Haah…Ever since my shoulder surgery, my arm won’t raise up all the way. And it’s not as if I can deliver kimchi by walking…

“That’s why I said you should rest on the weekends…”

–Aigoo, it’s all right. By the way, why did you call?

“… It’s nothing. I was just curious about how you were doing…”

–Your mom is in a cafe with her church members. Ah, that’s right! You remember Gyu-joon right? Gyu-joon hyung [4]. He used to live next door.

“Yeah….I remember him.”

–Apparently he just recently got married!

“Ah….Is that so?”

–Do you have a girlfriend yet?

“No, I don’t even have time to date.”

–I guess if you go into Dungeons, it takes the entire day?

“Y-yeah….”

The more I heard about my mom’s inconsequential stories about daily life, the less I could speak. Though my mom spoke about Gyu-joon, who became a 7th rank civil servant and married this year, she was always proud that people took interest in her “son who goes Dungeon diving”. I mean, ordinary people think that all Users are somehow successful.

In the end, I couldn’t say what I wanted to and ended the call. However, as soon as I did, she sent 500,000 won to my account. I felt guilty–I said I was okay…

–Cheer up! And come down to visit every once in a while….I want to see my son’s face.

Thinking about what she said before I hung up, I wanted to sob.

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: Whew~ Three chapters out! Translating forum posts and game terms is difficult when you’re not used to it haha! Despite it being an infodump,

thank you all for reading!

Footnotes

1. senior, in industry or academia
2. literally buff meth
3. A coo-ing sound
4. Hyung is a term defined loosely as ‘older brother.’ It’s used by men (the female alternative is oppa) and usually denotes intimacy and/or respect. Hyung can be used both for real biological brothers and for close older guys that one isn’t related to.

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Chapter 4

Chapter 4

And so, instead of giving up, I decided to spend some time mulling over how I could make a living as a Necromancer.

Common methods for users to make money included selling items from dungeons, streaming for profit on personal broadcasts, or receiving advertising offers from companies.

Super famous Users, commonly referred as Rankers, were often commissioned by the government to fulfill “quests,” and received official sponsorships for companies. Of course, there’s no way I could be a ranker, so that avenue was closed off. Similarly, I didn’t have enough equipment to broadcast anything.

Since I go into the dungeons every day, I decided to organize the remaining items in my inventory to figure out what’s possible to sell.

“Inventory.”

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[Iron Heart Ring]
Type: Ring
Durability: 17
Equipment Level Restriction: Level 5
Special Skill: None.

Description:
A low rank ring with no outstanding features. Raises defence by +5

[Orc’s Crude Fan]
Type: Fan
Durability: 10
Equipment Level Restriction: Level 10
Special Skill: None.

Description:
A fan made with the crude skills of an Orc. Frost/Cryo damage is increased +1

[Iron Shield]
Type: Shield
Durability: 33
Equipment Restriction Level: Level 15
Special Skill: Push (Low-rank)

Description:
Pushing an enemy with the shield while holding it forward can throw an enemy off balance.
Defense increased by +20

[Orc’s Teeth]
Type: Reagent, Accessory Material
Durability: 1

Description:
Stinky, revolting teeth. They are noticeably heavy. Can be used as low-level ingredients for reagents and accessories.
*Recipes can be found in the Skills window.

[Bubble Slime’s tattered toy]
Type: Reagent Material
Durability: 1

Description:
This was a young slime’s favorite plushie. Can be used as a low level material for reagents.
*Recipes can be found in the Skills window.

[Worn-down Leather Shoes]
Type: Shoes
Durability: 3

Description:
Leather shoes that can't be worn for too long due to their thin soles.
Defense increased by +1.
If you disassemble them, you can get old leather (weapon material).

.

After organizing my inventory, the number of tems barely filled my hand. If I sell all of these, could I even get 300,000 won? [1] Items like the Orc's Teeth and the Slime's toy need to be sold in stacks of a thousand to be worth the effort.

For now, I only require low-grade potions for combat, but now, each bottle is worth 50,000 won…and these materials were painstakingly gathered for two months…At this rate I'll be driven into bankruptcy.

[Clack Clack]

As soon as I gave a deep sigh, Lackey took the [Orc's Crude Fan] and began to gently fan me.

"Thanks…" I said.

After lying on the bed some more, I decided that after spending all this effort organizing, I should try and sell some of these items. With that in mind, I turned on the [Market Raid] app.

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Nice to meet you, User 'Choi Lee-kyun 1327'! Would you like to receive today's hot deal coupon?

Let's be cool~ all summer long! 50% sale for various cooling items!

‘The new “Master Blacksmith Lee Dojin,” that user ‘Choi Lee-Kyung 1327’ has registered as an account of interest, has updated.’

‘Choi Lee-Kyung 1327’-nim![2] Do you have any items for sale? [Three-legged Crow’s Eyes] are currently on the rise in the market. For [Three-legged Crow’s Eyes], if you register now, no sales commission will apply!’

.

I cleaned up all of the incessant pop-up messages and organized all the items I wanted to register. One by one, I searched their listings on the marketplace. A deep sigh came out when I realized that all of them were selling for a much lower price than what I had seen before. Still, there was nothing else to do, so I began registering the items.

‘Market Raid’ was an auction platform that could only be utilized by Users. The system allowed members to see both the [immediate purchase price and the auction starting price] for any item on sale. When said product is sold, a purchasing supervisor (the advertisement called them ‘marketmen’) will come to your house to pick up the product and hand you the payment.

I auctioned my scant items for about 10 won cheaper than the other listings. As they were being sold, I scrolled through the countless items listed on the app, mouth drooling.

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[Blade Blessed by Tivia Forest]
Type: Sword
Durability: 2,800
Equipment Restriction level: Level 130

Special Skills:
*When worn, all stats are increased +1,200.
*Water and Earth affinity is increased by 10%
*Earth attribute monsters are unable to land preemptive attacks.

[Elf’s protection]: With blade in hand, this skill allows you to call forth the Water Spirit Undine. (Undine’s attack power is proportional to your own stats and attributes.)

[Purification]: Creates a shield that is not affected by poison or darkness attacks.

.

[Auction Price Start: 1.65 billion]
Immediate Purchase Price: 7 billion.

Current Bid: 2.49 billion. (Current auction price is automatically renewed every five minutes). [Renew]

Time left in the auction: 22:07:13

Wow….These really are otherworldly prices. I can’t believe that a sword costs the same as a luxury apartment.

The other items listed below were also extraordinary. [Cursed Ring sealed by Demoness Mon’vert], [6 Circle Wind Parade Magic Book], [Diana’s Demonic Staff] and so on… Most of them cost well over 1.5 billion. After scrolling, I went to Lee Dojin’s, an artisan famous for making the luxury weapons I desired the most, personal market…

Of course any of her creations were sold out as soon as she uploaded them. When I arrived, they were already gone. However, I could still browse the information and images of the weapons she sold.

[Stradivarius of Bewilderment]
Class Restriction: Bard
A weapon produced by Master Blacksmith ‘Lee Do-jin.’
Type: Instrument (Violin)
Durability: 3,000
Equipment Restriction Level: Level 150

Special Skill:
*At the start of all performances, status effect ‘dazed’ may be applied.
*Reduces performance time for all songs by 15%
*Increases skill attacks by 20%.
*While buffed, skills with [taunt] effects are amplified.
*If you play without a single mistake, an extra [charm] debuff will be applied.

[Siren]: If successful, the skill will nullify the aggro of all hostile enemies and confuse them.

[Solo Recital]: Disables enemy shields and mental protections, and limits enemy movement for two minutes.

[Encore]: Restrains enemies for 1 minute after a performance has ended.

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Waa…It’s outstanding. Any bard with this weapon can force their enemies to stop and listen, captivated, by their songs?

In addition, any weapons made by Lee Dojin had a beautiful design. At first glance, the violin seemed plain. But, when you zoom in, subtle shiny patterns are hidden in the wood’s grain, while magic letters are engraved into the surface.

It was both extravagant and gorgeous.

Magical Craftsmanship, which is to instill a skill within a weapon, is often a fickle process. I don’t know much about it, but the blacksmiths of the community say that the letters used for magic crafting are difficult to make small. It’s also almost impossible to engrave letters as the crafter shapes them.

She’s a genius among geniuses…

<Immediate Purchase Price: 30 billion>

However, I felt pain when I looked at the price.

Lee Do-jin, who sells one weapon for 30 billion, is crazy, but the rich people who waited to snatch up any of her limited creations were crazy too. Thinking about it all, I felt destitute. With a bitter heart, I checked the sales I posted (about 250,000 won in total), and closed the app.

I turned to stare at Lackey. Empty eye sockets stared back as they continued fanning me gently.

Lackey grasped none of this as it's a low-grade skeleton…but since it's 120 centimeters tall, I feel as if I'm rearing a small child. I had forgotten it, but it kept on loyally fanning me.

My heart was touched, "It's okay now…," and I ordered it to stop.

[Clack Clack…]

"Thank you…I really only have you."

[Clack Clack!]

Lackey had a habit of scratching its cheek (it's cranial bone to be exact) with its fingers after I thanked it.

Perhaps it's embarrassing, or perhaps it thinks its effort is worthwhile when I thank it….Even though it was only a pile of bones, I still felt that it was quite cute–a bit like a smart puppy who could understand my words.

So, I gave Lackey a ride on my shoulders and stepped out of my accommodations. I was going to the hub's downtown center, and it likes to go on walks with me.

"Did you see the busking video yesterday? That was hilarious…"

"Woojoo-nim, Are you going to the Black Swamp today?"

"He's selected a new wyvern recently…"

I headed to the plaza where many Users gathered and mingled.

Footnotes

1. About 300 dollars
2. Nim is a suffix of respect, a bit like the Japanese -san

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Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Many Users lived in Hubs close to Dungeons. Certain people, like those who became Users too young, or those that have families to support, live outside…but because skills are illegal outside of one's hometown, many prefer to live in these unrestricted areas.

Just look at the city I'm walking in: a Beast Master's twin headed adder, an Alchemist's golem, and an Animist's spirits filled the street.

As I passed, I looked into a terraced cafe at the side of the road. A woman dressed in a robe, drinking coffee, was chatting passionately with a cat sitting across from her. Seeing the broom floating next to her, I wondered if she was a 'Witch.'

Suddenly, a gigantic shadow appeared over my shoulder. When I turned my head, I saw an Alchemist, lounging on a huge golem's shoulder, plodding through the side alley.

When I first became a User, these types of sights were shocking…Of course I've seen a few broadcasts on YouTube, but the impact of personal experience was incomparable.

The streets and buildings of the Hubs are all modern–the shopfronts populated by many familiar franchises–but the vibe was definitely different. So, as soon as I became a User, I informed my parents that I would be moving out. Soon I was living in a small lodging for about 500,000 won per month.[1]

Pressing [Buy a House] on a stele in the Hub's center will bring up several purchasing options. The smallest and most basic house is a single-story building with a mini garden, two rooms, a bathroom with a bathtub, a living room, and a kitchen.

These houses aren't slowly built by outside construction workers. When the payment process is completed, the lodging is automatically "constructed" in 10 seconds at the location that's been designated.

Residential areas must be bought separately; the price varies depending on the location of the house and the surrounding facilities. (In other words, the land prices are also high).

In addition, storefronts and businesses in this city are also able to be purchased. That's why there are still big corporate stores and sponsored products in here…

There were numerous User-run stores selling products with special abilities, as much large corporate franchises. Even if you had no money to buy anything, window-shopping was still quite entertaining.

In particular, [Flavor13] is an alchemist's workshop known for selling supposedly delicious potions and supplements. Users who could afford to drink potions stamped with their logo were probably well off.

Though these potions may be the same grade as others, the workshop justifies its 1.5x price hike on the high quality taste. The lowest-priced [Low Strength Potion] I usually buy at the auction tastes like a single spoonful of strawberry scented syrup mixed into water, like the flavor seeped into the delivery box it came in. Simply put, it tastes like dick [2]

I've only tried Flavor13's strawberry flavored potion once. It really was oh-so delicious–the strawberry scent was strong, as if real minced strawberries were added into the flask.

The low-quality potion I usually drink slowly recovers HP after 10 seconds. However, Flavor13's creations boast quick recovery times, but I couldn't afford to invest too much money into consumables…

Next to Flavor13 stands a small office building with a sign that reads [Yoon Bo-seok's appraisal]. This business was built by it's owner Yoon Bo-seok, an alchemist with the [appraise] skill.

Sometimes high-grade item rewards for dungeons can't be utilized until they are appraised. Yoon Bo-seok appraises and unseals the items for those that have no resources to do it themselves.

I heard you can charge quite the commission for something like that. Even now, there is a long line of users in front, waiting for item appraisals. Ahh…I also want to obtain an item extraordinary enough to be appraised by Yoon Bo-seok.

"Excuse me?"

As I was surveying the city, someone suddenly tapped my shoulder from behind. When I turned, surprised, a heavy-set Warrior wearing a gun turret stood patiently.

"…Yes?" I hesitantly asked.

"What is that on your shoulder?"

Ah…he must be asking about Lackey, who had been imitating a scarf this whole time….

"This is my servant…" I said, slightly embarrassed. I pulled Lackey down from my shoulders to the ground. Lackey vigorously shook the hem of my pants; perhaps it didn't want to be moved.

"A servant? Is it a summon?"

The man must have been incredibly curious; he wouldn't cease his persistent questions. Furthermore, the question I had been fearing fell from his lips.

"What is your class?"

I briefly entertained the idea of ignoring him, but I saw a group of men and women staring at him from across the street. They were probably his "party."

Ha…

I tightly grasped Lackey's hand and swallowed a sigh.

"Necromancer…." I replied, a half-beat late. Necromancers were often treated poorly or ridiculed. Regarded as shady or useless.

As expected, the man in front of me donned an odd expression at my words.

Then, with a slightly dismissive, disdainful voice, he said, "Wow, I've never seen a Necromancer before." He looked over my body as if he'd made some exotic discovery.

At least he looked a bit sheepish when I stared at him with no reply. The man soon went back to his party shouting, "Hey! I got the answer!" His clamoring voice rang loud, like church bells.

I wanted to throw a pebble at the back of his detestable head.

However, I kept patient.

It's not as if he did anything to me…Besides, types like him would usually pick a fight if you were to argue.

But, the more I think about it, the more frustrated I became. Those bastards, he probably knew the answer from the very beginning and intended to make jokes at my expense. Even so, I didn't have the courage to confront him. I simply kicked at some stray stones on the way home.

Before I realized how hopeless Necromancer was, I'd confidently post [Looking for permanent party] in the Ranking Gods community forum. No wonder I matched with no one. When I realized that my class was the issue, I was hopelessly depressed for a while.

I felt like I became life’s chew toy?

Of course, I admit I didn’t conduct proper prior research.

However, Ranking Gods was not originally such an open community. Especially in its early days, the community was filled with highly optimized players exchanging information. Newbies weren’t welcomed. It wasn’t until after I joined that the community became so widespread and famous. After reality had crashed down on me, I stopped advertising for a party and resolved to live alone.

Sometimes, at dungeon entrances, people would snicker at me behind my back. Perhaps they felt justified in ridiculing someone with no future. When I encounter people within dungeons, I would feel their eyes giving me a once-over. Those gazes would instantly change when they saw my servant, Lackey. I was angry, but I would just further avoid their path. Maybe I have an inferiority complex; maybe I just don’t want to make a fuss.

After a couple of these interactions, I even thought about going around with Lackey unsummoned.

However, Lackey would express his sorrow within his [current mood] display in his status window.

‘Did Master forget me?’ and ‘Please don’t abandon me even if I’m so useless….’

I couldn’t bear those heart-breaking lines every time I opened his status window. Eventually I started having him summoned all the time. To be honest, I would have been lonely without him. Ever since I came to the Hub, I haven’t had a single friend.

“Hey, let’s not be so discouraged…”

[Clack-clack…]

I told Lackey the words I wanted to say to myself. We should cheer up and get ready to go to the dungeon tomorrow. I added a set of spare armor,

some potions, and some snacks (for my bored mouth) to the inventory.

“Should I bring an umbrella too?”

I opened my cell phone to check the weather…

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[Bae Jaemin, ‘I will overcome the pain of three years ago.’ … He will re-challenge the <Tower of Command>]

[What could have been the cause of the number 1 most-shocking accident of all time, ‘The Tower of Command’?]

[Bae Jaemin, ‘This time, I refuse to sacrifice anyone.’]

[Bae Jaemin, ‘A Firmly resolute expression’ ….(Photo)]

[How will the Red Lotus’ final attack on <The Officer’s Tower> turn out? Subtitle: How the survivors of disaster recover from tragedy (Bae Jaemin’s exclusive interview.)]

The keywords “Bae Jae-min” and “The Officer’s Tower” filled the real-time search engine. Various links to the Ranker Bae Jaemin were provided.

The <Tower of Command>…I vaguely remember that a once popular guild had been wiped out during a raid of this dungeon. All except for Bae Jae-min had died. What was the name of the guild…?

Popular Searches

1. Bae Jaemin
2. The Tower of Command
3. Re-challenge
4. Red Lotus
5. The Disaster at The Tower of Command
6. Red Lotus Guild
7. Seo Dawon
8. Open recruitment for The Tower of Command raid

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That’s right, they were called the Red Lotus Guild….

Without relaxing, I began to search keywords for the “Red Lotus Guild,” and opened the article with the exclusive interview…

TN: Thanks for joining me for these two chapters! We’ve finally got a mention of the ML!! (Also, I have to say, it’s a very different experience translating something so mixed media. Translating out all the forum posts, app updates…and now a news article lmao.)

Footnotes

1. that’s 500 freedom bucks a month
2. Today I learned strawberry tastes like d*ck…also why does the MC know what that tastes like…

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Chapter 6

Chapter 6

<Special Feature>

Journalist: Jang Sooro

Centralized authority around the guild leader, arrogance, and lack of guild structural integrity causes the greatest disaster?

When the Red Lotus guild first announced that they would launch a raid on <The Officer's Tower>, everyone, including me, could not imagine the possibility of failure.

At the time, they were an elite guild whose members were some of the most well-known Rankers in Korea. Before <The Officer's Tower>, they had cleared many Dungeons using genius plays that others would find hard to recreate.

Those who saw their broadcasts of their raids on <The Queen's Undersea City> and <Second Company>, notorious Dungeons known for their high-level difficulty before <The Officer's Tower> had appeared, would agree that it would not be an overstatement to call the guild's performance an "art." They were undefeated living legends, documenting their own myths.

What we believed to be the Red Lotus guild's glory days, when we cheered them on as they rode into their last Dungeon, actually masked inner strife and trickery, simmering below the publicized surface.

I dug up an interview of Geum Mi-young, who at the time was in charge of the guild's logistics and accounting, conducted by the prosecution on

January 7th.

“The ledgers were kept by Seo Dawon, and the specific account for <TheTower of Command> raid was kept vague. The whole process was not transparent at all; the information gap enforced through an iron fist.”

Red Lotus was a profitable guild who formed many broadcasting content and sponsorship partnerships with world-class enterprises. However, Geum Mi-young claimed that, in reality, the guild’s financial structure was worse than many small companies.

Additionally the guildmaster, Seo Dawon, had always said, “Don’t waste the taxpayer’s money. Do not accept commissions from the government, as much as possible.” While demanding these strict restrictions, he had been embezzling funds needed for travel expenses or marketing for personal items. Any employees who did not comply with Seo Dawon’s instructions were immediately terminated.

Of course, one cannot pin all the blame on the leader’s misappropriation, but rumors and effects of the management style emerged within the Dungeon teams themselves.

According to testimonials from the Red Lotus guild’s acquaintances, the members may have seemed like close friends on the surface, but, in fact, they were more akin to gunpowder barrels that may explode at any point. Additionally, Geum Mi-young also explained that the incentives and profit system were not transparent. A guild member could not know how much total revenue they earned without going through Seo Dawon.

An anonymous affiliated member said:

“The relationship between Seo Dawon and his team deteriorated rapidly since the raid on <Second Company>. Most of the issues stemmed from profit allocation. Whenever his teammates protested, Seo Dawon would make abusive remarks and threats such as: “See how well you guys can do without me,’ and ‘I’ll use my personal connections to destroy you all.'”

The team members hardly gathered or practiced in preparation for <Tower of Command>; most did not attend the weekly meetings.

Below is a testimony from Lee XXX, a former security guard for the guild office.

“These are the entry records. Yes, as you can see, most people (guild members) did not come to work that week.”

Perhaps this tragedy could have been foreseen. Severe strife still existed between the guild master and the members. Even though they were preparing for one of the hardest known Dungeons at the time, they didn’t have a proper meeting until just days before the onslaught.

“I told Dawon hyung that it would be dangerous for us to continue, but he was stubborn. So, we pushed ahead and rushed directly into the hard core zone. It was already too late when we realized we walked into a trap.” Said Bae Jaemin (the sole survivor of the disaster), revealing the dogmatic nature of the guild master, Seo Dawon.

His testimonial further identifies fatal mistakes that Seo Dawon made during the raid on <The Tower of Command>.

Map of the Tower of Command Routes:

Normal route: B-1 zone>trap>C>trap>A trap room that would send you back to A zone>Mid Boss room > Portal to the reward room
Hard core route: A zone > trap>trap>trap>trap>D zone > Reward and Boss room (estimation).
Normal Route 2: B-2 > B-3 > trap > maze section > maze section 2 > B-3 > Trap > Portal to the rewards room.

The route that Seo Dawon wanted to push through, despite the risk, had the fastest clear time. However, <The Tower of Command> was famous for its notorious traps. Most guilds would choose to travel the normal route if they were entering a dungeon for the first time. For safety.

However, the Red Lotus guild had always been known for being able to brush off the most dangerous and challenging routes. Even if their opponent was said to be a Dungeon more difficult than expected, the members could not back off for their pride.

“My Hyung, (Seo Dawon), who was maintaining the line from the middle fell into a trap that he couldn’t escape from. Our formation quickly collapsed afterwards. Hyung was the main offensive striker and played an important role in attracting the Boss Monster’s aggro. Without him, our normal patterns of attack were no longer viable. Ragi hyung, who was closest to the boss, collapsed helplessly. The others struggled to fight, but the situation continued to worsen. I ran towards my collapsed brothers-in-arms to save them, but suddenly I felt a burning sensation in my eyes and hands and collapsed because of the pain. I think the trap that took down Dawon hyung started a chain reaction and made its way to me. That’s all I remember about <The Tower of Command>.”

Bae Jaemin, the sole survivor, continued to calmly testify about his feelings to the news crew: “As a Priest, I’ve been beset by guilt. Perhaps if I didn’t lose consciousness at the very end, we may have all been able to come back safely.”

So, what does this re-challenge mean to him? Jaemin briefly answers this question below.

“I have to collect their bodies. It’s the only way that I, the guild’s youngest, can repay the kindness from my sunbaes [1] and hyungs who were like my family members. I want to relieve myself of this burden.”

.

.

When I finished reading the article, I saw a picture of Bae Jaemin looking to the side.

He had lost his right hand and left eye during the catastrophe–to cover that up he wore a black eye patch and black gloves on his prosthetic arm.

His pallid complexion added to create a gloomy atmosphere, but overall he was a handsome man with a fine figure. A weak smile graced his face.

Bae Jaemin's face was plastered on so many media outlets that I was familiar with it, but it felt so different seeing him in conjunction with the details of the failed Dungeon raid. When I first saw him wearing an eyepatch I thought, "Oh, 8th grader syndrome?" [2]and thought he was a bit weird.

To think that in some top Dungeons Users could sustain injuries that a potion won't recover….Scary…Even though he sustained so many bodily consequences, he's trying to re-challenge the Dungeon to recover his guild mates' lost remains…

Perhaps the thousands of other readers and I shared the same feelings of gratitude. Nearly a thousand comments flooded the page, praising Bae Jaemin.

.

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lkh****

Who the heck bullied my Bae Jaemin..I could say more, but I speaking ill of the dead won't help matters…Anyway, Jaemin hyung-nim! [3] I've been a fan of yours since you were in Red Lotus. Of course I believe you'll succeed, but please don't strain yourself. Come back safely without any more injuries!

(171 replies)

sw3****

Red Lotus's guildmaster Seo Dawon was infamous for being problematic since long~ ago. When he was alive his childish followers would all suck

up to him saying how cool he was…but I hear that the bereaved families of the guild members still gnash their teeth when they hear his name. That's why even if a person has skills, they have to stay humble to go far…

(55 replies)

xx0****

"As a Priest, I've been beset by guilt. Perhaps if I didn't lose consciousness at the very end, we may have all been able to come back safely." << I really admire this. Isn't he Buddha reborn?

(2 replies)

cfc****

Bae Jaemin, he's a real amazing guy…I guess he's not a Priest for nothing; how could anyone be so altruistic? Who else would risk that dangerous Dungeon again to find the remains of those who led his body to ruin? Not even blaming them…Even reproaching himself…In just two lines of his interview, you can really tell he's different from a certain Mr. Seo.

(7 replies)

.

.

Under that article, a special addendum [What are the qualifications needed for the public recruitment of teammates for the Tower of Command raid?] appeared.

What on earth is this?

Curious, I clicked on it.

TN: The story is officially underway! Woot! We're one step closer to knowing about mystery behind ML lmao

Footnotes

1. A senior in industry or school
2. Basically someone who hasn't grown up and is childish. Also known as Peter pan syndrome or Chuunibyou.
3. Nim is a marker of respect. Kinda like the japanese -san

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Chapter 7

Chapter 7

[What are the qualifications for joining open recruitment for the ‘Tower of Command’ raid?]

News Anchor: The Korean Dungeon Associate has announced <The Tower of Command> raid schedule at 4 pm on the 21st. They are now accepting applicants for users who meet the qualifications to join the raid. After the Red Lotus guild’s disaster, entry into the <Tower of Command> has been banned for about three years due to safety concerns. It was classified as a high risk dungeon. Why do you think the government has allowed these raids again?

Reporter: Yes. First of all, did you know that the next dungeon won’t “open” unless you clear the highest grade dungeon in the system? In other words, I think many are making a conscious decision to continue the so-called ‘main scenario quest’. Many countries, for example Japan, are already entering the second season of the scenario quests, but Korea is still stuck on Scenario 1-30 (TN: Season 1 part 30) after the ban.

Anchor: If the decision has been made for the sake of national competitiveness, are there countermeasures in place for the safety of the general User?

Reporter: Yes. The Dungeon Society provides this explanation. They plan to only select qualified users, in advance, to enter the dungeon. According to their announcement, the hard core route must only be challenged by at least 15 users with a minimum level of 80. Solo play or individuals that do not meet the level restriction are not allowed. Normal routes may be challenged by teams of 10 or more with average levels of 50 or higher. All

parties MUST include one healer-affiliated class, such as Priest or Bard– someone that can provide emergency medical assistance. In addition, individual emergency recovery kits should include at least 20 intermediate potions.

Anchor: I see. Then from when can we expect to be able to participate in the raid?

Reporter: First, you can apply online on August 30th, starting from 9 a.m. You can easily register through the official application “User Alerts” from the Korean Dungeon Association. The final results announcement will be scheduled to release on September 2nd, at 9 a.m.

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Ah, finally the Tower of Command raid has been sanctioned…

I then finally understood why Bae Jaemin became such a trending topic. He was the only surviving User from the past…and he was planning to join the governmentally approved raid…

I also began to thoroughly read the other articles below.

[Tower of Command, expected earnings exceeding 300 billion won]

[Can a new ‘Rookie’ rise to fame? Prospective rankers buzzing about the opening of ‘The Tower of Command’]

[Popular broadcaster ‘Berserker’ announced his intent to join the raid.]

I began to consume all kinds of gossip.

I also opened the official ‘’User Alerts’’ app…new updates about <The Tower of Command> were uploaded there as well.

At least the normal route…

I carefully read the list of reward items and monster drops given on the first clear of the Dungeon–my hands paused for a while when I saw a familiar item.

<**List of acquirable items**>

Murky glass beads – 95% chance to drop from normal mode ‘Cursed Poporing’ [1] +
Contaminated Dark Liquid – 95% chance to drop from normal mode ‘Mournful Slime’ +
Fog Flower – 50% chance to acquire when using the skill “gather” in a normal mode trap room. +

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.
.

Contaminated Dark Liquid…?

You can get one of those in this Dungeon? Where have I seen this before?

“Lackey Status Window!”

.

[Lackey – Servant of ‘Choi Lee-kyung’]
Grade: Low-level Skeleton
HP- 2,500/2,500
MP- None.

Loyalty: Extremely high
Disposition: Dark, evil, gentle, lazy (double check old disposition)
Current Mood: ‘….I always love going on walks….’

…

Evolution – You currently do not possess the required materials.

I grasped the translucent status windows with my hands and trailed through with my fingers. At the very end, my finger stopped.

“Ah!” I exclaimed. Evolution!

That’s right…I saw the name here?

So I pressed the [reinforce] button.

Currently you lack the required ingredients for evolution. Do you want to check for insufficient ingredients?

As soon as I pressed [yes], the list of ingredients needed for evolution immediately popped up in front of my eyes.

[Materials needed to evolve ‘Lackey’ are as follows.]

Low-grade reinforcement stone … 1 (0/1)
Crimson Tail-feather……. 20 (20/20)
Honey from a Tilted Bee…… 1 (1/1)
Dried Frog Skin ……. 10 (10/10)
Contaminated Dark Liquid…… 1 (0/1)

It’s here!

I definitely didn’t misremember! I confirmed that ‘Contaminated Dark Liquid’ was present at the bottom of the list.

All this time, no matter how many auctions I searched, the ingredient was missing…I guess it could only be found in <The Tower of Command>. I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry–despondent at my wasted effort and elation that I finally found a clue.

Now that the dungeon is finally open, the ingredient will soon be distributed at the auction house, right?

It would be expensive because it originated from a new dungeon…but it was simply an ingredient not a full “item.” However, I knew I had to delay any expectation that I could evolve Lackey quickly.

When I pressed the [+] icon next to the material, an image of the item and a more detailed explanation appeared. And so, I began to research the most important and sorely needed ‘Corrupted Dark Liquid.’

<Contaminated Dark Liquid>

The item drops when you kill a ‘Mourning Slime’ without burning it. This viscous fluid with a rotten stench is widely used as a base to make armor, accessories, weapons, and potions with ‘Darkness’ and ‘Curse’ attributes.

Place of Acquisition: Tower of Command, Normal Route.
*This ingredient cannot be traded between Users.

My grin hardened.

What…?

I rubbed my eyes and read the last line again.

This ingredient cannot be traded between Users.

Then…If I want to obtain this one ingredient, I have to personally go to The Tower of Command? There’s no other way to acquire this?

Of course, some items are infamous for being untradeable. Bae Jaemin, from today’s article, was known to be a Ranker in possession of many untradeable items. [The Prayer of Saint Beatrice] seemed to be its name? The rosary shaped accessory was rumored to be an incredibly adaptable item that could not be obtained unless its previous User died or formally transferred the item over.

But, that’s an accessory.

In addition, it’s an extremely high-grade item.

I'm searching for ingredients….Can ingredients be permanently bound to the User? It can't be sold?

Then…How am I supposed to obtain it?

I became so incredibly frustrated that I flopped onto the bed and gave a short scream, "AHHHHH!" Lackey must have thought I was playing around–he climbed onto the mattress and began horsing around.

I righted myself and began to think calmly. However, no matter how much I contemplated my current situation, I couldn't think of a solution other than joining the <The Tower of Command> raid.

According to the previous article, the normal route requires at least 10 party members. For a mangy necromancer like me, who already doesn't participate in ordinary parties, I'll be turned away if I were to apply.

No, the bigger issue is that I'm level 42, and it takes months to level up to 50…! At this rate, I'm never going to be able to step foot within the Tower; Lackey's evolution will be nothing more than a pipe dream…

–'Berserker' Live broadcast is now starting!

At that time, a notification for a channel I was subscribed to–Busker–popped up. I habitually reached out to delete the notification…when an idea suddenly crossed my mind, and I entered his livestream.

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: I want me a skele-buddy too T_T

Footnotes

1. Slimes from ragnarok online

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Chapter 8

Chapter 8

For a while only a black screen could be seen; after some subtle noises of a microphone being tapped, a familiar room appeared. A fat man with red dyed hair and a gold necklace walked into the room carrying a big mug.

He greeted everyone with a lecherous voice. “Good day, I’m Sang-Yoon, how’s everyone doing?”

The subscribers’ live chat, which had been lighting up long before the man appeared on screen, began to fire quick greetings, insults, and acknowledgements.

-Urk, keke, a piggy came
-Hyung, did you get fatter?
-What’s with that cup? It’s f*cking huge.
-The cup is as big as Sang-yoon-ie’s [1] head >.< Maybe it holds 2 liters >.<
-Even if that was filled with water, you’d gain weight haha
-lolololololol immediately subscribed just now…what a sight
-Already eating something?
-weee woo~ [2]
-Nice to meet you~
-I get angry when I see your face

He was a popular streamer, so the chat became incredibly active. And the channel originally advertised his comedic talk and his gangster-like face rather than a serious show of Berserker’s ability. The level of criticism for the streamer was high, but the atmosphere itself was lively.

Berserker, his nickname, gave the comments no consideration and, blinking his eyes, began to fiddle with the camera. Donor messages began to explode in real time.

The subscriber partnership system was donation based. Whenever people donated, their messages would be heard on air with the emotionless voice of a machine…so it was often funny to see the system read outrageous messages calmly.

-[‘Sangyoon Villain’ donated 1,000 won.]
“Sangyoon-ah *comma* you must have earned so much money *question mark* Your face is getting larger and larger; soon it’ll explode.” [3]

-[‘Flower Sangyoon’ donated 1,000 won.]
“Sangyoon Hyung, are you really going to the Tower of Command *question mark* Isn’t there a weight limit *dot dot dot*

-[‘Abby’ donated 1,000 won.]
“Sangyoon-ah [4] *dot dot dot* let’s reach the end of the Tower of Command, live, and get more subscribers *exclamation point*

Berserker, Kim Sangyoon, smirked while reading his donation messages and the live chat log.

-But Sangyoon doesn’t have the talent for ‘Tower of Command,’ right?
-He’s going to get caught in the entrance of the dungeon.

At those messages, he simply answered, “Thank you subscriber-nim,” and ignored its content, holding back unexpectedly. Soon afterwards, 30 minutes past the start of the live broadcast, he greeted the chat again properly.

“Today….all of you should already know…the Tower of Command Dungeon has reopened. I was thinking of speaking on that matter….”

-Sangyoon, are you going as well?
-Sangyoon posted on Instagram, before the broadcast, that he was going to

join.
-Sangyoon-ah, there's a weight limit on that raid…
-Let's go, Let's go, Let's go
-Please do it live, Please TT_TT

"Yes, of course I'm going to go……That's right, I posted that I was going on Instagram. Oh, but I'm level 70, what a waste! So hardcore route is out of the question…I seems I'll be raiding the normal route." Sangyoon said.

-Hey, let's ask him to join us since he weighs more than 100kg
-lolololololololololol
-What's the cutline for hardcore route?

"No~ My weight doesn't exceed 100~. What are you guys even talking about, lol? Ah, what's the hardcore level restriction? You guys have to be at least level 80! Yeah…so I'll start by conquering normal mode first."

Kim Sangyoon then brought up the <User Notification> app on the screen so that everyone could see it.

It was the list of normal route rewards that I saw earlier. Kim Sangyoon then began to read through it all, one by one, while adding explanations and personal comments.

"This Dungeon is….how should I put it? A Dungeon that produces darkness and curse attribute items? That's what I feel. The dungeon will be profitable for classes with darkness properties. Like Treasure Hunter, Assassins, and…..what else?"

-Witch?

"Right, Witch…..What else?"

-Necromancer lolol
-Kek (lolololololololol)

“Oh, uh. Hahaha…..Necromancer…that’s right. If Necromancers still even exist. Anyway! There seems to be a lot to obtain in this dungeon. So, will this be useless to other classes? That’s not the case at all. There’s bound to be good basic rewards in such a solid dungeon. The payout will be amazing if you manage to clear it.”

-So there’s nothing for those whose system is based on blessings??
-P R I E S T

“Hm, at first glance it seems like there’s not much benefit for those of the opposing attribute….but, instead, Priests and other light-based classes..Like animists? have higher attack power in this dungeon. Opposing attributes are compensated with higher damage capabilities to clear the dungeon.”

-As expected, this time around Priest is still 1st tier.
-Once again Priests are a necessary evil?
-Ah~ just when are these heal bots gonna get nerfed~~~~
-Sangyoon hyung, what’s the best item from this list?
-Hyung! Which do you prefer, normal route 1 or 2?

“The best item here?? Hm…..What I’m aiming for is the item on the third line here, <Tower of Command’s Assassin’s dagger>. The weapon’s attack is crazy, but it also has an added ‘bleeding’ effect special skill! I’ve read that wounds created by this weapon won’t heal, resulting in damage over time. That’s why I think this weapon will be the most expensive out of all the weapons that can be sold. As for what route I’m going? Undecided.”

After watching this far, silently, I sent a live chat message to Kim Sangyoon.

-Sangyoon-nim, when you go, will you please carry me? T_T I really desperately need one ingredient, and I’m willing to take just that T_T [5]

Perhaps he didn’t see my message, or perhaps he chose to ignore it, Kim Sangyoon continued his explanation of the raid without answering my

query. I had no choice but to sponsor him and re-send the message I wrote.

Donation messages are not buried by the live comments and, instead, pop up on the left side of the stream–separate and easy for the streamer to see. The message boasts colorful effects and a large size which lingers for several seconds. In addition, it was almost impossible to ignore the machine-like voice message that accompanied it.

-[‘Choi Lee-Kyung’ donated 1,000 won!]

“Sangyoon-nim, when you go, will you please carry me? *crying face* I really desperately need one ingredient, and I’m willing to take just that *crying face*”

The machine’s un-emotive voice echoed, and Sangyoon gave a small, “Thanks Choi Lee-kyung nim.” He frowned, as if he was considering something for a moment.

In the past, he had advertised that he’d carry paying subscribers with him on various raids. Perhaps this time, too, he would be overtaken with that desire.

“Carry? Hmm….But it’s my first time to this dungeon…It might take a long time.”

Oh? He didn’t immediately refuse?

I didn’t think I’d ever get a chance again if I lost this opportunity, so I hurriedly sent another donation.

-[‘Choi Lee-kyung’ donated 1,000 won!]

“Sangyoon-nim, I really only need to defeat one slime in that dungeon. For a master like you, this shouldn’t be difficult at all *crying face crying face*

“Ha, but….I haven’t really discussed this with my party members yet….”

However I felt hope from seeing Sangyoon's troubled face, hands scratching the back of his head.

When I thought he would begin to refuse, "Hmmmm, maybe this time…." an idea quickly flashed through my mind. I quickly sent another donation.

-['Choi Lee-Kyung' donated 1,000 won!]

"Sangyoon-him, I'm a Necromancer! Please, help me just once *crying face*

After seeing my last donation, his eyes grew comically round. The live chat, which had been barely active, began to increase its speed tremendously.

As expected, the audience's reaction was explosive.

-Lolololololol
-Godcromancer pffft
-Really??
-Omg! Sangyoon! Take 'Lee-kyung' with you!
-lolololololol ah sh*t [6]
-Lol, I'm crying
– "That class"
-Lolololololol, he's a king-cromancer kek
-Waaa It's the first time I'm seeing someone with that class.
-Absolutely nuts kekeke
-I bet he's desperate
-Doesn't he regret it??

Kim Sangyoon began to burst into laughter. "Wow….Hahahahaha! Really? Necromancer?"

My face flushed red, but no one could see me anyway….I steeled myself and answered [-Yes] in the chat.

Somehow Kim Sangyoon found my response in the midst of the deluge of chat messages. "Wow, he says it's for real….Wow….Why'd you choose

that class? How damn hilarious….” He was speechless, with half mocking and half meaningless admiration.

And then.

“Lee-kyung-nim, what level are you?” he asked.

Heart pounding fast in my chest, I quickly responded.

-I’m…level 42;

At my response, Kim Sangyoon stopped laughing and looked like he was at a loss. “Ah…..But, those in the normal route should be over level 50….”

-Of course you have to **carry** him Sangyoon-ah;;
-Let’s see how good you really are
-If it were me, I’d raise him up
-You laughed so much, you aren’t going to do it?
-But why on earth did he choose to be a Necromancer???
-If he’s for real, his intelligence is suss
-It’s gotta be a lie, lolol
-You can’t carry Necromancers?
-Go on! Take him!
– Let’s go Let’s go Let’s go!

“No, guys….It’s not that I don’t want to take him….I, too, want to bring him with me, but the regulations…”

Finally the words I’ve been waiting for tumbled from his mouth. Nice!

I quickly copied the recruitment qualifications and made another donation wish to Kim Sangyoon.

-But Sangyoon-nim, in normal mode the individual is not limited by level. The average level of the party must be over 50! TT_TT I’m level 42…can’t we make this work somehow?

Kim Sangyoon immediately closed his mouth. The chat became inundated with demands to “be cool” and to “carry him!”

In reality, Sangyoon wasn’t a good-natured person.

He talks like a bully; those who accompanied Sangyoon on raids often criticized him for being arrogant. He gave no care nor interest to those who wouldn’t benefit him…

However, he is a streamer, and streamers must always be wary of their viewers. In particular, Kim Sangyoon became famous for viral videos where he was at his subscriber’s beck and call. This time, though, the request involved a very difficult Dungeon–Sangyoon’s safety was at stake. I looked at his pursed lips and prayed, “Please!”

“Aigoo [7]….All right. Lee-kyung-nim, shall we meet tomorrow?” Kim Sangyoon smirked, as if my desperate cries reached his ears.

He actually agreed.

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: Translating chat logs…too much slang…

Also this is a poporing, from the previous chapter!

Footnotes

1. ‘ie’ is a term for endearment, often tacked onto the end of names.
2. The sound of an ambulance, if that wasn’t clear, haha
3. The system is literally sounding out all the punctuations
4. Another term of endearment attached to names!
5. means to “carry” or “help.” It’s derived from the slang word for “dope.”
6. is the censored way to say Sibal, or ‘Shit’ or ‘Bastard’
7. A sound of exasperation

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Chapter 9

TN: From now on, Necromancer summons will be called “spectres,” and Animist summons will be called “spirits,” in order to differentiate between the two.

Chapter 9

Kim Sangyoon is a Warrior.

I’ve heard that he was a judo player before formally becoming a Warrior User.

Just by looking at his imposing figure, his red-dyed hair and tough-looking face, one would think that his personality would be like a gangster’s. However, he had an image that was quite gentle compared to his appearance. Viewers loved how he closed his sharp eyes while giggling at their jokes, or how he stuttered with a red face at their teasing.

So, I thought when I saw him in the flesh….I really wanted to know what bastard theorized that Sangyoon would be pure and gentle offline.

His face and back were burned red from the sun. His forearms were full of tattoos and gold necklaces adorned his neck. On top of that were sharp sunglasses…No matter how you slice it, he’s totally a mobster, isn’t he? He certainly didn’t look like a judo player…

In addition, though he didn’t seem to be flexing his muscles much, the tendons sticking out of his large hands were quite threatening. Trembling, I put the already empty coffee cup to my lips. I was too nervous to make small talk, so I drank the last dredges at the bottom, every last drop.

It’s barely been 10 minutes since we met…

Why does he have to be so seemingly combative in person?

“So, I asked my teammates about this?” Sangyoon started.

“Ah, Yes!”

“Well, my crew thinks that it’ll be fun–that we’ll farm a lot of high-quality footage for broadcasting…”

“Ah! Yes, thank you, Hyung-nim!”

“But…you know, right? Originally, this wouldn’t make any sense.” Kim Sangyoon, who had been looking only at his cell phone without saying a word of acknowledgement, only spoke when I finished my cup of coffee.

…It’s our first time meeting and he’s speaking informally to me? [1]

But, I couldn’t express my dissatisfaction, and I also had a rough idea of what he desired from his vague words….With the brightest smile I had in my repertoire, I pulled an envelope out of my bag.

“I…for you carrying me….., I wasn’t going to just receive all this help with no appreciation. It’s not much, but this is a small token of my sincerity…” I said.

“Well….”

Kim Sangyoon immediately snatched away the envelope and scanned its insides even while hedging empty refusals.

Yesterday, I had pulled out all the money I could prepare within a day. I thought it might be necessary during the meeting. It was only two million won, but….

“Hmmm…”

But his expression, while looking inside the envelope, was still flat.

I cursed inside, calling him exceedingly greedy, but still smiled obsequiously on the outside. “Oh, I was preparing in a rush yesterday…If you don’t mind, I’ll have another envelope, just like this one, prepared by the end of today.”

Only then did Kim Sangyoon’s thick cheeks twitch into a big smile. He immediately patted my shoulders.

“Haha! Now you’re speaking my language.”

“Ha ha ha……” I laughed, in slight pain.

“Here’s my business card. You see the email address on the back? Send me your ID and your e-User notification address as well. I’ll call you when the party is all registered. See you in front of the Dungeon, don’t be late!” Kim Sangyoon acted incredibly friendly as he shoved his business card into my hands.

“Yes!”

“My account is also listed on that business card.”

“Yes! I’ll deposit by the end of the day!”

“Alright, Nice working with you.” Sangyoon then stood up from his seat, mumbling. I barely held in a sigh until he disappeared into his sports car.

In fact, from the beginning I split the money into two two-million-won envelopes. I kept the second envelope as insurance–worried that the other would ask me to give more. As expected….

……Ha.

It turns out the average cost of a party carrying you through the <Tower of Command> dungeon is 4 million won; I suppose I found a cheaper deal. But…I was a little heartbroken to spend 2 million just for an ingredient and not a piece of the end-room final reward items.

Lackey, who had been hiding in my bag, stuck his head out and peered at his surroundings.

“Hey Lackey….When you evolve, you’ve got to pay me back for all my kindness, okay?”

[Clack Clack?]

Of course, Lackey didn’t understand me and tilted his head to one side. I just hoped that he would be effective as a contract-bound spirit when I pressed that “Evolve” button.

Like a Necromancer, an Animist also receives a low-level spectre at the very beginning. The spectre is low-grade and quite useless without resources, but it is famous for its evolutionary efficiency. An Animist’s mid-grade spectre cannot be compared to its low-grade pre-evolved form.

So I also, hesitantly, placed high expectations on my minion.

Please, I’m begging for another skill other than bite…. Ah, and I heard that mid-grade spirits are able to communicate well after evolution–they gain their own personality. Wouldn’t Lackey become even more intelligent, then? Of course, I have no complaints with how cute he is now…

The spirit also looks more impressive after it evolves… As a low-level spirit, its form is small and its voice chirps cutely. There was no sense of gravitas. After evolution, however, the summon matured with a sense of otherworldly beauty….

I thought about Lackey, and how it may gain beauty after evolution. But what’s there to improve–the base is already a skeleton. There’s nothing particularly aesthetic about the undead. Honestly, though, I’m not interested in beauty or looking *cool*….If he could just become powerful, I could become a confident User. That’s enough for me.

* * *

Time flew by, and it had already become the official grand opening of the <Tower of Command> Dungeon.

After checking on the stock of hard-earned intermediate-level potions in my inventory and placing Lackey within my system space, I left home. A mobile portal nearby would transport me to the entrance of the Dungeon.

The moment the magic runes on the portal glistened and shined, I immediately found myself at my destination. About 200 meters away, a 10-story building sporting purple crevices stood tall. Given the police tape in front of it, that building was probably the infamous tower.

Already, a dizzyingly large crowd had gathered. I wondered if all the Users that lived in the Hubs nearby had crawled out of the woodworks…

I looked towards the most crowded place, where people gathered in throngs. Rankers stood while reviewing plans, blinding eyes with the shine of their flashy items.

“Wow!”

“It’s Bae Jaemin!”

“So dope”

Suddenly the surroundings became noisy; a flurry of activity surrounded the portal. Bae Jaemin and his party members stepped through the residue of bright magical lights.

Bae Jaemin’s stature was more diminutive than I had imagined, but he commanded everyone’s attention with his bulky, black equipment. Before I knew it, I also stared at him with rapt attention.

Ring~ Ring~

The sound of my cell phone took me out of my reverie. Startled, I answered quickly–Berserker, Kim Sangyoon, was at the other end.

–Where are you?

“Ah, I….I just arrived.”

–Do you see NC11 among the banners? We’ll be there, so come quickly.

Click–

“Yes!” The call ended before I could properly answer….

However, I ran for NC11 without delay. The banner was in the exact opposite direction of Bae Jaemin.

“Oh, you came?” Sangyoon casually said.

“Hello!” I responded.

“…….”

“…….”

I immediately found Kim Sangyoon, as noticeable as he is in this crowd, from afar. Upon seeing him, I ran up and greeted him at 90 degrees.

Kim Sangyoon at least acknowledged me. The 15 or so men holding dark bags that surrounded the streamer only stared at me. Those men did not respond to my enthusiastic greeting.

‘Am I late?’ I thought, flustered, as I checked my watch. ‘No? I came 20 minutes before the scheduled time……’

I flushed red with embarrassment and settled near Kim Sangyoon. However, Kim Sangyoon did not introduce me to those around him, nor did the others say anything to me. Soon enough, everyone began chatting around me.

I felt ignored and upset, but today’s goal wasn’t to build friendships but rather to obtain the important evolution ingredient…for that purpose, I had to endure.

Looking at Kim Sangyoon smoking and talking with various streamers, I vaguely settled back into a corner.

“Sangyoon-ah, I don’t think we can broadcast. They want us to clear away the cameras.”

“What?”

“There’s a ban on filming today.”

“What? Why?”

30 minutes before entering, a public service official suddenly gathered the party leaders and delivered the news; none of the listeners looked particularly happy.

Some complained, but the civil agent was adamant. From afar, I briefly wondered what would happen to me. The leader of our party, an assassin, had come back and said that filming was officially banned.

The party atmosphere rapidly deteriorated, perhaps because the members all earned a living off of making videos. I avoided their eyes, holding my breath, for fear of catching their eyes–I didn’t want to give them a reason to leave me behind. They had kept cursing, but eventually they had no choice but to leave the cameras to an outside friend and began to stand in line.

In the meantime, Kim Sangyoon took out his cellphone and updated his social media account, “I can’t broadcast due to filming regulations.” Soon afterwards, the officials came and began confiscating all cameras and cell phones…I too had to hand over my phone.

“Geez…Why can’t we film?”

“Apparently Bae Jaemin said we have to clear all cameras.”

“Bastard…Can’t we just forbid broadcasting of the hardcore route?”

“Apparently he said that there were overlapping sections in the routes. He mandated a blanket ban for everyone.”

“Crazy bastard.”

I overheard the conversation of the people lined up in front of me. Supposedly, the sudden regulation on filming was Bae Jaemin’s fault.

I had never been to such a high-ranking Dungeon before, so I wasn’t familiar with the scene. The people in front of me had an exasperated attitude, as if this had happened not once or twice, but many times before. Everyone seemed oddly familiar with Bae Jaemin’s strange commands… could one word from a man truly take away everyone’s cameras without serious protests?

I wanted to ask Kim Sangyoon, but he seemed to be in a serious discussion with the party leader.

After all filming equipment was confiscated, it took a while for the various parties to calm down. Soon, an old man took control of the microphone attached to a podium in front of the tower, and began his speech.

TN: Thanks for joining me for these two chapters. Next up: Finally the dungeon! We’re getting headway into the story (and to meeting ML!)

Footnotes

1. = informal speech. Generally there’s levels of respect to speech in Korean. One usually does not drop formality until both parties have agreed to it and are close–not following this pattern would be seen as rude. Exceptions may exist in relationships of disparate authority such as in school, in the workplace etc

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Chapter 10

Chapter 10

“Good morning everyone. I am Lee Dae-chul, congressman and former Warrior,” the man greeted briefly. He led everyone in a one minute silent tribute to the fallen members of the Red Lotus guild. After asking us to return safely, he stepped away from the podium.

Perhaps because this particular dungeon was so high profile, many high-ranking officials seemed to have made an appearance. Starting with members of the National Assembly, celebrities from all walks of life came to greet and give speeches before stepping down.

The last man to speak, a Korean Dungeon Association official, gave a speech on safety precautions and procedures for emergencies. While waiting, I covered my yawn with the dungeon brochure I received in advance.

“Nevertheless, All we ask is that the users pay utmost attention to their own safety….That’s it.”

The official had the shortest speech; perhaps he restrained himself and wrapped up quickly because he was the last speaker.

After the association official stepped away, [10, 9, 8….] a countdown appeared on the big stage screen. Everyone waiting collectively held their breaths and turned to look, focusing on the dungeon entrance. When the [1] on the screen disappeared, a light began to leak out from purple crack–the opening of the <Tower of Command> dungeon.

.

‘Berserker Kim Sangyoon’ party’s <Tower of Command> raid is beginning. If you are ready, please press the button
[Yes.] [No.]

A translucent message window appeared in front of my eyes.

I pressed the [Yes.] button and waited around 20 seconds for the rest of the party to do the same. Suddenly, my vision flooded white, and I closed my eyes tightly.

While eyes were closed, our senses were battered and we experienced some vertigo. However, when we opened our eyes after feeling solid ground, our party was in a huge cave full of humid and damp air.

Was this the inside of the tower?

Welcome to the ‘Tower of Command.’

The familiar voice of the system reverberated in my ears.

Scenario 1-30 will now commence.

Surprisingly, while there was a long line of people ahead of me entering the tower’s dungeon, I couldn’t see anyone else except my party members when I entered

I knew that if the dungeon’s scale is large, the parties would be randomly divided into sectors based on difficulty. I had known all of this information on paper. But, since this was my first time entering such a high-level dungeon, everything felt so fascinating to me.

“Salamander!”

“Light!”

A man in our team, who appeared to be an animist, called forth a fire spirit and brightened the dim surroundings. The other party members also used whatever skill they had on hand to create a light source.

This was my first time seeing a Salamander, a low-grade fire spirit. It was small, the size of my palm; the spirit spun around, trying to catch its tail with its mouth. How cute….

Crash

Berserker Kim Sangyoon summoned a humongous great sword and stabbed it into the ground.

This great sword was a high-grade rare item–one that Sangyoon was incredibly lucky to receive. He rose through the ranks and into fame wielding this greatsword. The sword's name was 'Berserker,' and, eventually, Sangyoon co-opted the name of his sword for himself…indeed, it was an unusual weapon that radiated the stench of blood from its blade edge.

Kim Sangyoon swung the greatsword that was as tall as he was with one hand and approached the flute-carrying Bard. "Enchant," he ordered curtly.

The Bard calmly placed the flute by his lips; soon, a somewhat familiar–possibly famous–classical music began to flow out of his instrument.

Buffs are being applied….

In no time, everyone took out their weapons and gathered near the Bard. This "Enchant," was the greatest advantage Bards had over Priests. The Bard's [Enchant] skill is able to strengthen all party member's weapons. As soon as the performance began, Kim Sangyoon's greatsword began to emit a blue light.

The same was true of the other party members' weapons.

The Assassin's daggers, the Treasure Hunter's crossbow, and the Mage's staff all began to glow blue; even the Animist's Salamander became slightly chubbier. Of course, Necromancers are barred from a Bard's buff, so I experienced no change…

"It's done," said the Bard.

“Suman-ah, Take the lead.”

“Yes!”

Suman and two of his fellow Treasure Hunters moved to the front of the party. The most important task for a Treasure Hunter is to detect traps and find additional loot. Thus, these people usually act as guides in dungeons.

Suman moved carefully, tapping the floor or using skills to find and dig at sparkling areas of the ground. Fifteen minutes after beginning the expedition, we arrived in front of a large lake.

Suman, at the front, stopped moving a short distance away from the lake. A bridge of stepping stone sat patiently in the middle of the lake. However, even I found it too suspicious to simply cross.

Kim Sangyoon asked Suman, “What is it?”

“It’s…There’s no reaction, but it seems like a trap….”

“Should we throw something at it?”

“Mmm…Wait a minute.” Suman aimed with his crossbow and shot across the lake.

The arrow, which flew quickly with a *whoosh* sound, suddenly ceased all movement at the lake’s center. Looking at his arrow suspended midair, Suman shouted “Hawkeye!” to activate his skill, but the surrounding lake only glittered briefly and revealed nothing

“Sangyoon hyung, I suspect we’re required to fight a monster here to proceed…”

“Everyone, get ready for battle!”

“Yes sir!”

I had no particular role, but I wandered back and asked Sangyoon, “Should I follow behind you?”

“No, you stay here. When we’re finished, we’ll call you over. You can cross then.”

“Okay…..”

Kim Sangyoon brandished the greatsword once over his head and fell into a ready pose. “Euryaaa!” with an indistinguishable war-cry, he ran towards the lake.

Behind him, the Mage followed, shouting “Haste” to cast a buff increasing the party’s movement speed. This time, my body also felt much lighter. I tried jumping in place to test it out, and I was surprised to reach twice my usual jumping height. Unused to this increase in ability, I fumbled the landing.

“Undine! Protect me!”

The animist who had already summoned a Salamander finally summoned an intermediate spirit.

Blue drops of water began to gather midair. A mermaid-like fairy shimmered into existence and began to shoot a stream of water ahead. The glassy surface of the lake broke into ripples and waves as pale hands crawled from the depths one by one, over the stepping stones.

What on earth is this? So gross….!

A trap has sprung!

A slightly foreboding message appeared before my eyes.

The owner of the ashen hands, half-exposed now, was, shockingly, a giant fish. We were treated to the terrible sight of many human arms sticking out of its mouth.

The fish jumped onto the stepping stones and began to approach the party at a tremendous speed. Looking closely, dozens of insect legs were attached to the torso–not unlike a centipede.

While I was wrinkling my brow at the strange silhouette, a notification popped up in front of me: [New monster data has been updated!] The monster’s information unfolded before me.

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Tower of Command – Human Hand Snare Fish

The fish is called the human hand snare fish due to its tongue which is shaped like countless human hands. Be careful, if you get caught by the disguised tongue, you will get dragged into its mouth!

It has high water resistance and magical resistance, and is vulnerable to fire and electric attacks. Members of its shoal share a deep bond; attacking one will attract many more from the deep. Killing too many of them will offend the king of the snare fish.

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I wasn’t the only one who read the information window. The animist, whose Undine was chucking streams of water at the lake, unsummoned his water spirit and called out Salamander, the spirit of fire, once again.

The chubby lizard crawled on the back of the human hand snare fish and started burning it quickly. The savory smell of cooked mackerel filled the cave, but these fish looked nothing like one.

“Fireball!”

Meanwhile, the mage began to randomly throw about fireballs here and there, bursting the enemy fishes. They seemed to be physically trivial compared to their terrifying look, each fireball turned two or three of them into heaps of ashes.

However, Kim Sangyoon’s actions were more impressive than the Mage and Animist.

“GRAHHHHH! DECISIVE SLASH!” Although he kept performing as if he were broadcasting, over-killing with flashy movements, his ability to simultaneously cleave several jumping snare fish in two was admirable.

The greatsword, Berserker, was an item that grew stronger the more it drank the blood of its enemies. As it cut the monsters, it grew sharper, unleashing more unbridled savagery onto its opponents.

The Treasure Hunters covering Kim Sangyoon also shouted, “Rising shot!” Arrows pierced the monsters, pinning them to the wall. Riding that momentum, Kim Sangyoon did not hesitate to throw his body into the pandemonium, defeating half the mob.

Wow, high level parties sure are different……

Their hands and feet are in sync.

“Huh? What’s that?” But the Bard, who was one step away from the battlefield like me, was astonished to discover something else in the lake.

I also squinted in the direction he pointed. The water began to swirl as bubbles rose–an unusual sight. I recalled the last line of the monster’s information: [The snare fish’s king….].

“Sangyoon-nim! Please look behind you!” I shouted. Kim Sangyoon heard my voice and began to look towards the lake.

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: Thanks for reading~ I want a salamander too T_T

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Chapter 11

Chapter 11

It was then.

The king of the snare fish had emerged.

News of his brutally murdered kin must have reached the bottom of the lake…

Good Luck Fighting!

A translucent system message–vaguely cheering an indeterminate side–popped up, and the name <Io, the king of the human hand snare fish> appeared over his head.

Io was a monster with the head of a fish and, below the neck, the body of a bulky, half-nude man. That image was already shocking, but the giant eel he was riding looked to be a huge problem. At a first glance, his weapon was unrecognizable due to its sheer size. The length was enough to clear the expanse of the lake, with a little bit left over. The party members urgently gathered near the lake, preparing for defense.

“Shit….Hey, we’re on normal mode right? Why is there a named monster in the first stage?”

“Is that an eel?”

“Wow…The fishy smell of the water is nauseating.”

“If we blast past this guy, I think we’ll be in the normal route starting from the next stage. That means this guy is an entrance mob

monster….”Suman said, a bit embarrassed. As soon as Io appeared, he had taken out a strange telescope and peered out across the lake.

‘What on earth, does that mean that extraordinary force is wielded by an entrance monster?’ I thought. However Kim Sangyoon didn’t hesitate after hearing Suman’s report. He simply shouted, “Let’s go!” and stormed forward, Berserker in hand. The other party members also didn’t seem all that nervous either.

“Do you want a sacrificial blessing?” The bard asked.

“Let’s give it a try, first.”

“Alright.” The bard was poised to play another melody but instead, at Sangyoon’s words, put down his flute.

I couldn’t believe he didn’t request extra buffs while facing a mob that size…I looked at the party, half worried and half trembling with anticipation.

Suddenly, the trap room’s master, Io, began his attack.

A [Danger!] sign enshrouded in red light popped up in the air. Io stabbed the eel in the head with the gargantuan staff he was holding. The giant eel began to flail its head around; a massive tidal wave formed in the lake in accordance with its movements, threatening to flood the party members.

“Undine! Stop it!” The Animist protected the party by building a huge water barrier just before the tsunami hit, but, soon afterwards, a black and long body slithered in front of the barrier. The giant eel had surfed the current.

“Dodge!”

“Arghhh!” One mage, who had not avoided its first attack, was hit directly by the eel’s tail and bounced off the wall.

‘That ear-splitting scream just now, surely….he isn’t dead, right?’ The Mage that flew into the wall crumpled to a heap and did not stand up again– I found it hard to tear my eyes off him.

However, with the situation ahead, there was no time to worry about the Mage.

“Damn it…What kind of scales are so thick?” Kim Sangyoon lifted his sword and brought it down on the tip of the eel’s tail. As the two clashed sparks, like grinding steel, flew, but not even a small scratch was left on the eel’s surface.

The same was true for another Mage, on the opposite side of Kim Sangyoon.

In addition to the obvious Fireball, the Mage threw around “Additional Fyre!”, a more sophisticated flame magic. The eel’s scales were only barely scorched–no real damage.

Furthermore, the real enemy was not the eel.

The eel was just a means of transportation for [Io].

[Human beings? How fresh.] Io grinned. His aforementioned staff was revealed to be a fishing rod at a closer glance.

When Io wielded his rod, a lure connected by a transparent thread hooked into a User’s collar. The User, a Treasure Hunter, floated into the air and was flung into the lake behind Io; dozens of white hands breached the surface and pulled him under.

Those must all be human hand snare fish…. those who fell must have been ripped apart, like a piranha swarm. Likely, those Users are now dead.

It was disgusting and horrifying to see faint blood clouds spreading from the place where the Treasure Hunter sank. The Bard, who was watching next to me, was ill at ease and white in complexion.

“Buff, hey! Give me a Buff!” Eventually, Kim Sangyoon shouted at us, avoiding the violent movements of the eel’s tail. Despite his pale demeanor, the Bard picked up his flute and began to play. The melody of his strongest buff, “Sacrificial Godly Protection,” disseminated in the air.

However…

[So loud~.] When Io heard the song, he turned straight around and rushed towards us. Of course both the Bard and I were startled and immediately ran away.

It was for naught: Io swung his shiny fishing rod, producing a frightening noise that resembled air ripping apart. Though we were far away, a huge pit formed straight in front of our noses. It was as if a bomb had fallen before us.

If I had taken one more step, I would have been caught in the explosion and killed….At that moment, my feet stiffened in fear.

“Urk!”

My neck felt a bit strangled–immediately my struggling body was dragged into the air by some terrible force.

That monster was aiming for the moment we stopped in our tracks, unable to run away–that moment when I can’t help but pause in fear. As soon as I stopped, he wrapped the base of my neck with fishing line.

‘But, if it wants to complain about the noise, why grab me instead of the Bard who performed?!!’ I lamented the injustice, even as I struggled against the dragging force. In the blink of an eye, I was low enough to make eye contact with the fishy pupils of its young.

Just before I bumped into Io’s body, I screamed “Don’t!”

Io’s grotesque smile widened. He then cast me into the lake at a far greater speed than before.

‘This, crazy….!’

As the surface of the lake got closer, I managed to come to my senses and called out the only weapon I had. “Lackey!” My minion was summoned the moment I splashed into the lake.

I had no desire to learn that, if you fall into the water at a very high speed, the shock of the impact will dull your senses. No matter how hard you try to calm down and move, you can’t, and your body just sinks deeper and deeper…

I held my breath in anticipation of the fall, but I had not predicted that I’d sink almost to the bottom of the lake. Unfortunately, I had kept my eyes open through this whole process.

The lake seemed to be well over ten meters deep. But, more than the depth, the main issue was the white hands swimming quickly to where I sank.

Fortunately Lackey’s summoning completed successfully. Though it was a bit slow, Lackey, as a skeleton, had no particular restrictions in water. Slowly, it pushed my floundering body to the surface.

However, this was fish vs human.

Of course the opponent had superior speed.

‘No…!’ I continued to desperately struggle to swim, but I had no suitable items or skills to utilize in this situation. Furthermore, I had little experience in swimming, and soon began to suffocate.

White hands, writhing like seaweed, had chased right behind Lackey. It was only a matter of time before the fishes caught me and I became another trophy ‘hand’ in their mouths.

Just as my life flashed before my eyes, the temperature of the water felt like it became much colder, and my body tilted in the current. The snare fish did not dare swim any closer; on the contrary, they began to back away.

….What’s this?

I glanced down and screamed silently. I had been expecting the bottom of the lake, but, instead, an endless precipice came into view underneath my floundering feet. I turned my gaze to the surface, worried about what might pop out of that never-ending darkness. No matter how I struggled to swim, however, my body kept on sinking downwards. As if something was pulling me down.

‘Am I going to drown like this….?’

When I once again thought it was the end, fortunately a small bubble of air formed next to me. The air bubble began to cling to my neck, travel towards my face, and became rounded like a spacesuit helmet.

At first I was panicked, thinking it was another attack. But, after the bubble had completely enveloped my head, I could begin to breathe the fresh air that was injected into the bubble as water around my head evaporated. Perhaps this was a skill cast by one of the other party members.

After a while, I heard a familiar voice within the air bubble.

[Hey, you. You hear me?]

It was a calm, rich voice of a man.

This voice is…..The Animist….? I’m saved! He’ll come to rescue me!

“Haaa…Haaaa….Yes! Yes!”

[Hey, you. You’re alive right?]

“Yes!”

However, the risk of drowning was not completely alleviated. Even after the bubble formed, my body submerged endlessly. I cried and shouted, “But I’m still sinking! What should I do?!”

[Where are you? At the lake bottom?]

“Yes! It’s so deep…..”

I felt some current swirling around me, negating my efforts to swim. Rather, it may be more useful to stay still and not waste any extra energy. Nevertheless, swimming or stationary, my body continued to sink quickly.

Now my body had entered the consuming darkness in which I couldn't see anything but the faint glim of the spirit that surrounded my neck and head. Although Lackey's cold fingers were clinging to me, I was more shocked by the sudden chill of the cold stream of water that brushed my arms. Goosebumps came over me–it felt just like a shark hovering, hunting….(Of course, though, this was a lake….)

In the end, shaking, I cried, "Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim are you there? I'm so scared…." After hearing my voice, the Animist attempted to explain something to me.

[Right now you….It says you've moved onto the next zone?]

"Eh? What does that mean….?"

[That's why…..you know?]

"What??? I can't hear you very well….What did you say?"

[Ah, you're too far away…….How…….That……]

"Hyung-nim?"

[10 minutes to go…..]

His hazy voice trying to explain something was the last I could hear before an ominous disconnecting sound. Was the spirit too far from its summoner? What will happen to the spirit? I was nervous and trembling in fear, worried that I may lose my ability to breathe.

TN: This is why I have thalassophobia….
Thanks for reading guys~ NS is a great stress reliever to TL during exam times.

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Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Something touched the soles of my feet, and my body stopped its descent. Did I truly reach the bottom of the lake?

You passed the first hardship without a hitch! Congratulations, you've been given the key to move onto the next round.

As if reading my mind, a golden system message appeared in front of me and congratulated me for passing the stage. A small golden key floated in front of that message; as soon as I held the key in my hand, the floor began to shine brightly…as if someone had pressed a switch.

When I looked at my surroundings through the light, I found that I was stepping on a gargantuan tombstone stuck in the middle of an endless, barren lake bottom. At one end of the tombstone, a statue of a lion's head was carved into the rock; its gaping maw seemed to be an entrance. Maybe I'm meant to progress through the lion's jaws.

I couldn't see anywhere else to leave except through the tombstone–and nothing else could be seen for miles around. Eventually, despite my trepidation, I was forced to walk into the statue's open mouth.

A black iron door barred the way within the lion's mouth; the keyhole seemed to perfectly match the key I just received. Once I pushed through the door, a bright light enveloped my body.

Soon, I was transported into an unfamiliar cave, soaked body and all.

* * *

[Clack Clack.]

“Haaaaah…..”

The moment I stepped foot in the cave, the water spirit surrounding my neck disappeared. Lackey and I flopped at the entrance, exhausted.

The Dungeons I’ve experienced so far and the <Tower of Command> were completely different. In the Dungeons I’ve been to, there haven’t been such intimidating monsters like before–if any of those dungeon monsters were named, they were most likely to be a slightly bigger wolf or a different colored orc than usual….

A few minutes ago, if it weren’t for the help of the Animist I would have drowned. I felt no relief for avoiding that crisis. Instead, I was just physically and mentally tired and depressed. Most of all, I was anxious about being separated from the rest of the party.

[O-hoo-hoo-hoo.]

Just then, I heard a strange sound from ahead.

I thought I’ve been hearing a racket in the background for a while now, but…You’re kidding me, is something coming over?

I immediately sprung up from my sitting position. Lackey, too, followed my lead and became alert. As soon as we did that, another chilling laugh rang out from the edge of the cave–this time sounding just a bit closer.

[Ahahahaha!]

Oops…you’ve wasted too much time. The devil of the tower is now approaching. It seems they’re looking forward to meeting you.

My foreboding intuition was accurate.

In front of my eyes a warning message, informing me of the appearance of a monster, popped up. I was forced to move in the opposite direction of

gradually frequent cackles. I may be heading for another trap, but right now the priority was evading that monster….

When I turned the corner, a shadow loomed from the other side.

It drearily hummed, [Who's there? Are you the one who'll play with me today?]

I had no choice but to turn back around and run the opposite way.

This time I discovered and entered another alley through a forked road. However, even as I ran, the humming sound came closer and closer.

I returned back to the fork, leaning my back against the wall. I wanted to see what the monster looked like, so I turned my head towards the encroaching sounds. I almost screamed when I saw it.

At first, I thought she was just another human being. However, as the monster came closer and stepped underneath a light stuck on the wall, a grotesque figure was revealed.

In place of her eyes were empty sockets, crying tears of blood. The mouth was eerily torn. She was dressed in a blood-stained white dress holding an unfolded parasol. She hummed and sobbed [Where are you? Where are you?]….I knew that if I were caught by that monster I would have no chance of survival. In order to escape, I sent Lackey out first, hoping to draw its attention.

Lackey deliberately ran opposite to my chosen route. As Lackey passed, the monster turned its neck 180 degrees and found my skeleton servant. With her neck turned around like that, she began to run towards Lackey. Goosebumps raised all over my skin at that terrible sight. As expected, a monster that lacked eyes was sensitive to sound–it seems my life expectancy was extended for a short while.

So, I quietly waited for the monster to disappear from view and ran the other way.

A new monster’s information has been updated!

[Tower of Command — Lulu, wants a new playmate!]

Lulu: the devil of the labyrinth trap. She’s searching for someone who will be an empathetic ‘friend,’ one who tolerates her childishness.

She can resist dark and curse attribute attacks. Both her power and speed are very high; it’s best to run away if you encounter her. In addition, Lulu will sob and cry out for her nanny if she does not get her way. It’s said that her nanny is quite strict with her ‘friends.’

Lulu’s monster information was updated after she entered my vision; the information was somewhat similar to the description of the human hand snare fish.

In particular, the last line of the explanation was quite horrifying.

Doesn’t this mean, like that fish who rode the eel, that there’s an additional mid-boss in this stage? Hoping that Lulu wouldn’t cry, I moved along the labyrinth, nicking the walls with a dagger to mark my way.

But….

“Lackey” is in Danger!

A warning indicating possible danger to my servant popped up. Damn it, he’s already caught? Still, servants can always be called back to my side. So, I called out “Re-summon!” and transported Lackey to safety.

[Clack Clack Clack!!!]

Lackey had briefly stumbled when he was unexpectedly re-summoned, but, when he saw me, he hurried to embrace my legs.

I was wondering what was wrong with it, so I opened Lackey’s status window.

Current Mood: ‘I’m very very very scared!’

My guilty conscience was pricked. Well, even I would have been terrified out of my mind if a monster chased me with their head turned 180 degrees around. “Sorry….Let’s just quickly get out of here.” Freeing my legs from its grasp, I went back to the most recent fork in search of a path that wasn’t marked by my dagger scratches.

[Waaaaaaaaaaaa!]

I heard a tremendous cry.

The sound was distant, but it was definitely Lulu.

Ah….Why are you crying when I haven’t even touched a strand of hair on your head? If you cry like that your monster ‘nanny’ will appear! I hid, frightened, just in time for Lulu to throw another temper tantrum.

[WHERE DID MY FRIEND GO!!!!!]

No way, is she searching for my ‘Lackey?’ I looked down…Lackey was plastered to my feet, trembling, and shaking its head ‘no.’

Aigoo….It would be too much to ask a kid like this to face off against that monster again….After sighing, I gathered Lackey in my arms and darted for the last unmarked passageway.

Meanwhile, Lulu continued to scream loudly, echoing through the whole cave system. She made such a loud din that, if I were that kid’s nanny, I wouldn’t be able to ignore my charge’s tantrum. The cries were much worse than a fire alarm, much worse….

Lulu’s nanny, ‘Marien/Marienne’ is looking for you.

She promises to Lulu, ‘I’ll bring you a friend who won’t run away again.’ Isn’t it clear to see how she became so spoiled?

The system announced the entrance of another named monster, as if to taunt me. From the other side of the cave, I began to hear unfamiliar heavy thuds.

I ran to what I imagined to be the end of the cave at breakneck speed. As Lackey was far too small and may get left behind, I was forced to recall and store it into my subspace.

[My poor young mistress….you should be surrounded by only the most precious of things….But you've been pitifully locked up here….]

Behind me, the 'nanny's' eerie murmurs echoed. As the voice came closer, I decided to run without looking backwards. How the hell did it find my location so quickly?

As soon as I entered what I thought would be the end of the alleyway, the road forked in two. With a huge, grotesque shadow hunting behind me, I had no time to spare for careful decisions.

It's 50/50 anyway; I ultimately chose to take the left path….

"….I-it's a dead end?" Unfortunately, just a few steps into the path, a wall obstructed the way forward.

In a panic, I turned to go back to the intersection. However, at the entrance of my alleyway was the face of a woman with numerous wrinkles, her eyes were marked by broken capillaries. Her eyes searched mine with a fierce expression.

I screamed as soon as our eyes met, "Ahhhh!"

In addition, her face sat upon a very long neck, which was covered by dense fur….

[Are you the one who made my lady cry?]

As expected, that monster was Lulu's nanny.

TN: Hey Guys, I’m just going on a TL’ing spree. ML is so close (SO CLOSE!) (But also don’t use Lackey as bait T_T)

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Chapter 13

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As it slowly approached, I could see the name <Marien, Lulu's faithful nanny> emblazoned in red light above her head.

The monster came closer before I could react; the rest of its body was finally revealed…..No matter how I looked at it, she was a spider. When I saw the eight large legs blocking the way, I stopped breathing.

Does that monster even have sentience? It's obvious that it has the body of a bug….Ugh, but it's super horrifying.

Originally, I had no problem catching cockroaches with tissues, stomping on them. But, strangely, the spider looked too grotesque to touch in this situation…I couldn't wrap my head around its gargantuan size and a disgusting human face tacked onto a long neck.

I stepped backwards until my back touched the wall; I closed my eyes and turned away, unable to even look at the monster anymore. As I tore my gaze away, the thundering footsteps felt like a premonition of death.

But…..

[Marien–!! IT HURTS—! ARGH!!]

A high-pitched scream, loud enough to rattle my head, delayed my impending death.

'What's this? Is that Lulu?' Though there was still a shadow hanging over my head, I felt no further pain during the scream.

I cracked my eyelids open very carefully and slowly looked up. The Spider's sharp feet were a paper's width above my head, which was covered reflexively by my arms. It seems that Marien's attention was diverted by her ward's shouts of pain.

[My Lady….?] Marien retreated at a tremendous pace, scampering across the walls. Only then could I–shaking–lower my crossed arms. I couldn't believe I was still alive.

The retreat begged many questions.

Why did Lulu scream? That scream was somehow different from her tantrum while searching for Lackey…Did my party somehow finally arrive? Maybe it's not my teammates, and another unfamiliar team wandered into this stage. For a monster like that to be in danger, the only answer would be another User….

I drifted back to my senses and wondered if I should head over to the scream or wait in this alley. The best case scenario would be for the Users to also defeat Marien…but what if they fail, and Marien lives? She may come searching for me again. Our chase may be repeated with a different end this time…

So, I carefully walked back to the previous crossroads, and, this time, I walked towards the right. I was extremely nervous that Marien or Lulu would rush down the narrow passageway that I walked backwards from time to time. My whole body became soaked with sweat from the effort of staying alert.

But then.

A system message suddenly appeared, like a pop-up window.

Amazing! You've found the fastest route to the Tower of Command's reward room. We'd like to offer you some aid for future adversities. Would you like to receive the 'Hard Mode Event Buff, Guide?'

….What, what?

I rubbed my eyes, unable to believe what I had just read. There's something strange contained within those words?

"What kind of nonsense is this 'hard mode?' I entered through the normal route?!"

Do you wish to receive the Event Buff, 'Guide?' No response will be logged as a denial. 30….29…..

Even if I realized something was off, there was no way I could resist the system under the current circumstances. Although I had no idea what an event buff was, nor have I heard of a 'Guide' buff in general, I felt as if I had to take advantage of what the system offered. I pressed the [Yes] button even though this felt like a scam.

The 'Guide' buff has been applied. The guide has knowledge of all the routes inside the Tower of Command. For the next hour, we are able to guide you through the fastest or safest path to the Hard Mode reward room. Which path will you select? This choice can be changed during the journey.

> Fastest path….Estimated time: 35 minutes.
>Safest path……Estimated time: 55 minutes.

I looked blankly at the explanation window–how on earth did my journey get so twisted?

I definitely entered the tower in "Normal Mode," with the rest of the party members. While observing everyone else fight Io, I got caught up in an attack and was hurled into the middle of its lake.

Fortunately I escaped drowning with the help of the animist's spirit, but I continued to sink to the bottom. There was no way of returning to my party, and I was forced to advance alone. I was forced to advance alone through a twisted maze, chased by two horrid monsters, Lulu and Marien. After escaping the clutches of death at the hands of the nanny, I just continued to walk straight on the last remaining unexplored pathway.

That’s all.

But what’s with this ‘hard mode’…… Since when did I stray from the correct road? The previous dungeons I’ve visited were not divided into different, hard and normal, modes, so it was just all too confusing for someone inexperienced like me. [1]

Can I choose one of these two routes and continue to travel through the dungeon? If I had an emergency escape kit, I would have used it straight away…however, the escape kit was sold at a lofty price. Furthermore, the entire party would need to agree to leave the dungeon; I hadn’t predicted a situation where I would be separated and alone.

“If I knew this was going to happen, I would have bought one….Ha….”

Please choose your desired path.

Even as I contemplated my choice, the system sent out another notification, as if to urge me into a quick decision. I tried to ignore the alarm and walk forward, but my body froze after a few steps. It seemed impossible to proceed without making a “choice.”

‘Should I just go back?’ I thought briefly, but the fear of running into that spider monster kept me from retreating.

In the end, I chose the ‘safe route.’

Guide start…..Please watch your step.

After selecting, a green arrow began to pop up in my vision, a bit like a GPS brought to life. The navigation arrow, comfortably sitting at eye level, began to blink and indicate the correct direction.

As soon as I followed that signal, the scenery began to melt and transform into a new landscape. I was sure I was just in a twisted, winding cave….before I knew it, a vast, dark chasm sprawled out before me.

“What…..”

A rocking, unsupported bridge connected the two sides of the chasm. Don’t tell me….I have to cross that shabby looking bridge?

Please follow the arrow.

The arrow pointed cold heartedly at the bridge.

“But….I thought this was the safe route!” I teared up in exasperation, but the system remained unyielding.

Please carefully confirm the direction of the arrow.

Despite all my hesitation and my pallid complexion, the green arrow pointed firmly forward. Eventually, trembling, I grabbed the rope connected to the swaying bridge….

Please carefully confirm the direction of the arrow.

The green arrow suddenly turned red, and a warning message appeared.

‘What….? Did I do something wrong?’

When I pulled back and looked closely at the surroundings, I discovered a very small staircase leading underground right next to the entrance of the bridge.

If the bridge stretched perilously across the chasm, this staircase seemed to allow anyone to slowly descend the endless cliff into uncertainty….Oh! That arrow probably pointed at these stairs instead.

As I gingerly stepped on the stairs, the arrow changed back to its original green color again. This must be the way….I walked down slowly, keeping my guard raised.

“Come out, Lackey.”

[Clack Clack!]

Just in case, I summoned my skeleton and carried it on my back. I had asked the “Guide” to lead me through a safe path, but I was wary of dangers from behind. Of course, I didn’t think that Lackey would be of much use….

[Current mood: Doki Doki….] [2]

How should I say this? It’s just comfortable to have this baby by my side.

I sighed deeply.

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: Thanks for joining me for this chappy~ Since I’m Turbo TLing I think we’ll get to the ML tomorrow~

Footnotes

1. Something that I hope was conveyed is that the MC is incredibly confused–all of his sentences in the original are half finished phrases.
2. The sound effect in Korean is , the sound of heart thumping. I figure everyone knows Doki Doki but not Kongdak Kongdak haha

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Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Like that, I descended the stairs for a long period of time.

“Ha…Since when did I arrive at this hard mode route?”

[Clack-clack?]

As I carefully stepped down on the gradually narrower and steeper stairs, I thought once again about this paradox.

The most obvious answer seemed to be sinking to the bottom of the lake–because the next monsters, Lulu and Marien, were definitely not present in the normal route monster list I previously saw.

I regret not reading any information related to the hard mode. I had no intention of coming this way, after all. The low level Dungeons I’ve experienced so far had no labyrinths nor divided difficulty levels, so I had never imagined that one could just simply cross over. ….Although there’s a high probability that any preparation may still be rendered useless.

Amidst my confused worries, a horrible idea bubbled to the surface. Even if I safely reached the reward room, would the Boss of the <Tower of Command’s> hard mode route be waiting for me?

Three years ago, some of the top rankers in the nation were exterminated while trying to defeat the Boss…With just the two of us, what can Lackey and I accomplish?

No matter what, I couldn’t think of a satisfactory answer to my dilemma. I stopped walking and stared at the floating green arrow. When I stopped,

the arrow shook and swayed in the air, as if asking why I paused and urging me to step forward.

When I saw its erratic movement, I decided to clutch at straws and talk to the green arrow.

“Guide-nim…By any chance, could you lead me someplace else in the dungeon…?”

Of course I didn’t expect much–my question was another outlet for complaints.

Do you wish to modify the path?

Surprisingly, I received a positive response to my complaint.

Please call out your desired destination. Keywords can also be searched.

In addition, the ‘Guide’ let me know that I can search through filters for desired routes. I thrust a silent fist of joy into the air. This time I fell into a deep contemplation, I needed to properly use this GPS…I should think carefully…

So, I chose a few key parameters.

“The nearest place with no traps nor monsters!”

Scanning for possible routes….

As soon as I finished talking, the green arrow started blinking yellow. After a few minutes, it returned to its original color: [A new destination has been found.]

But…

The ‘Guide’ buff has been reapplied.

The guide has knowledge of all the routes inside the Tower of Command. For the next 45 minutes, we are able to guide you through the fastest or safest path to the keywords “No trap or Monster,” and “Nearest”. Which path will you select? This choice can be changed during the journey.

>Fastest Path….Estimated 15 minutes
>Safest Path……Estimated 55 minutes. The buff will expire during travel.

This time the remaining time left on the buff and the safe route travel time conflicted. Of the 60 minutes originally given, 15 minutes had been consumed getting to and walking down these stairs. Even if I were to go on the safe route now, there would be 10 minutes of guide-less travel.

However, considering how without a guide I’ve run into monsters like Marien, I felt like I could actually die in the fast route. Eventually I pressed [Safest path] and quickened my pace towards the direction the arrow pointed. Lackey fastened its hands onto my clothes, holding tightly onto my back…

Fortunately, the stairs began to widen, and it didn’t take much effort to descend. As I continued, the surroundings became darker and darker. Soon enough, I had to step according only to the green light of the guide.

Suddenly, the direction of the guide arrow changed.

Please pay attention to the front.

The arrow that had been steadily facing downwards had corrected itself. In front of me were broken steps and a flimsy wooden plank connecting across to a new set of stairs.

The brick wall I had been holding onto had been excavated, concave like a fireplace….I almost screamed when I saw what was inside of the wall while checking on the wooden plank.

An upside down bat, twice the size of my body, hung upside-down with its eyes closed within the recess. The bat looked like a stone carving and horns, like a mountain goat, grew out of its head…Anyone could see it was a monster. However it didn't move, so I wondered if it was a Dungeon ornament and not a real being.

New monster information has been updated!

How fortunate, you've come across a Gargoyle that's still asleep…It's a vicious monster that gobbles humans when awake, but, when asleep, it turns into a vivid and artistic sculpture. It's rare to have a chance to watch a sleeping gargoyle. Perhaps it wouldn't be too bad to observe it if you can afford the time.

A sleeping monster?

Upon closer inspection, it really did look more like a statue than a living, giant bat. But the description really did paint a horrid picture…I was constantly afraid that the bat statue would wake up whenever I heard a creak while stepping on the wooden planks.

The next step would take me right beside the upside down bat statue. Further down, countless gargoyle statues lined the walls as far as the eyes could see. The place was reminiscent of the inside of a beehive.

Wow….If I were to make a loud noise by mistake here…could those hundreds of gargoyles wake up simultaneously?

Every quiet breath was filled with fear. I still had a long way to go and I couldn't even see the end of the gargoyles. Perhaps Lackey was also afraid. It stopped its familiar clacking and instead plastered its forehead onto my back, trembling.

–Creak

“Urm……Ngh!”

Just when I stepped on the next plank…

The board cracked through the middle. I almost screamed as I felt my body tilting, but, fortunately, Lackey covered my mouth and muffled the noise.

As soon as I stepped across, the plank completely crumbled. With a “clang, clang, clang….,” it bounced off the walls and disappeared into the abyss. To my annoyance, it took more than a minute for the sound to trail off in the distance. I slowly looked up at the gargoyle statue next to me in fear.

-krssssss…..

The gargoyle did not immediately jump up and attack as I had feared….but rather, with a disturbing sound, tiny bits of stone crumbled from the body of the bat. As if the statue was going to wake soon….

Damn!

I turned straight away and ran with great speed, as though rolling down the steps. The pounding of my footsteps was certainly disruptive….but the sound of crumbling rocks began to bury the sound.

T-This is crazy…..That’s the sound of those jerks waking up, right?

[Kieeeeakkk!]

A foreboding premonition will always come true. The arms of a sooty statue in front jutted out, like the security gate arms that stop cars from entering apartment complexes..

I didn’t dare slow down, so I bent my waist as low as possible and passed underneath the arm….While passing, I regretfully turned my head to look at the statue, wondering why Lackey gave a tremulously clacked on

my back. The giant gargoyles fixed their shining red eyes on me, flapping their wings, and getting ready for a fight…

“AhhhhhhhHH!!” I felt free to scream as loudly as I pleased–the statues were awake anyway. The issue was not just the gargoyles pouring from behind but also the gargoyles still stirring in front.

The way forward was still clear of monster bodies, but, consecutively, arms poked out in preparation for flight. I hurriedly lowered my head multiple times while running.

Eventually, I sprained my ankle trying to avoid the sudden protrusions of arms in front of me. Of course, there were no kindly guard rails like on the stairs on a mountain behind my childhood neighborhood. My body helplessly stumbled off the stairs.

“No!”

I hastily reached out a hand, but I couldn’t grab onto anything. Lackey crawled onto my head and covered my vision with its entire body. Perhaps he was trying to protect my head and neck during the fall.

However, even if I couldn’t see, it was obvious that I was falling at a great speed. Soon after, I hit something in the air, as if something had caught me. The impact knocked me unconscious.

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Chapter 15

Chapter 15

For the first time in your life you've experienced a life-threatening event…Hidden conditions for a title have been met: 'Triumphant over a Life or Death Crisis.'

A strong impact has caused a significant reduction in HP.

Skeleton servant Lackey's endurance threshold has been exceeded due to a strong impact and has been recalled.

When I first opened my eyes, I was blinded by the countless overlapping system messages. I had wondered if there was a thick fog in front of me from the white of the message background. After I had realized that all the blurry, cloud-like things were messages, I cleaned them up quite quickly and focused on carefully testing my body's movement.

"Urgh…."

However, even when the desire to move was nothing more than a wish in the heart, my whole body felt such pain and chills. My teeth were shaking violently from the torturous aches. I hurriedly opened the inventory and retrieved a recovery potion.

The mid grade potions that I was forced to purchase before entering the <Tower of Command> were indeed helpful. First, I sprayed the potion on my (most likely) broken wrist and waited for the bones to knit themselves together. Then, the newly healed hand picked up a second potion and brought it to my lips.

I had thought that my lips were too slippery since I woken up, but later I realized that all the blood I had vomited was to blame. The potion should heal any internal injuries. Yet another bottle was used to treat my throbbing ribs.

“Where am I anyway…..?” After a full treatment, I could finally observe my surroundings.

Though the place where I fell was dim, I could roughly distinguish the nearby landscapes. A subtle orange light seeped through the round walls and softly lit the space.

As soon as my throbbing body stopped shaking from the pain, I quickly scrambled onto my feet in anticipation of possible threats.

! A New Discovery

When I braced myself against the ground to stand up, I felt something hard within the palm of my hand. I had thought it was something I had dropped, so I picked it up. Then, out of the blue, a [! New Discovery] alert message appeared. This was a message I had never seen before, and I warily pressed notification to read more. However, the explanation had only contained an utterly useless [In progress].

I thoroughly explored this unidentified object, fumbling around its smooth surface with my fingers. Fingertips eventually found a groove or perhaps a scratch and pressed it. After a click, the item began to glow with a white shine–finally there was enough light to identify the mysterious object.

It was a jewel inscribed with [light] magic often used by Treasure Hunters in Dungeon exploration. These jewels were often used as lanterns, but items with the capacity to store magic were often some of the most expensive equipment. There was no way this item was one of mine–I couldn’t afford such luxury.

So this must have been here far before my fall….Don’t tell me, if I touch it, will monsters suddenly appear?

But, even as the minutes flew by, there were no suspicious sounds. The item and the notification message simply glistened. So, I held the jewel like a torch and I shone some light on my surroundings.

First, I looked at the ground when I fell. In addition to the mottled black flecks of my dried blood, the dirt was soft and grainy–like sand. Upwards, I saw a darkness that hid the true depth of this cavern. I had no idea where I fell…but seeing the unending darkness that looked like the night sky, I had no idea how I survived what should have been instant death.

Moreover, the surroundings were incredibly spacious.

It was wide enough that I couldn't take the space in with one panoramic glance–almost as big as the World Cup Stadium. The overall area was visible to the naked eye, as if dim lighting had been turned on. Each far off wall still had orange light leaking through, adding to the atmosphere. And it was incredibly quiet, enough to hear the anxious pounding of my heart.

For a long time I didn't move, wondering if some event would start. However only the [New Discovery!] message kept flashing; I was forced to stand up and approach the nearest wall to observe the light that had been bothering me.

As I got closer, I could see that the light's origin were inscriptions on the wall's surface.

The lights produced weren't bright enough to really illuminate the whole cavern…It reminded me a bit of school art galleries. The inscriptions were similar to the glow-in-the-dark descriptions next to the exhibited artwork. Of course, in this case there were no exhibitions; only the inscriptions alone existed…

But for there to be glowing text in a place like this…maybe it's a hint to find some unspeakably amazing item? Well, it's hard for someone like me–someone that's not a Treasure Hunter–to find that hypothetical item.

I would've taken a photo of the inscriptions if I had a cell phone by my side…however, I valued my safety more than satiating the greed. I didn't

want to touch the shining text; though the words seemed beautiful, there was no telling what would happen if I were to disturb it.

Eventually I took one step backwards with the makeshift lantern. I slowly walked alongside the wall, but I stumbled after stubbing my toe on something hidden.

“Urk…!”

Fortunately, I had not stepped on a monster. But…something that looked just like a mage’s staff was rolling around underfoot.

To be exact, it was half a staff?

Why would there be a broken staff here? Perplexed, I searched carefully around the staff. Then, I found a large corpse lying not far from the staff; my body was frozen stiff.

At first, I had thought that some cloth was covering a large bundle…but that cloth turned out to be a robe worn by the face-down corpse.

The body was fairly obscured–I could only see the back of the prostrated corpse alongside a hand that gripped onto what I assumed to be the other half of the broken staff…Frankly, even this obscured sight was terrifying. I didn’t want to get any closer.

As soon as I identified that far off lump as a corpse, the system message updated.

! A New Discovery (2)

In a Dungeon, the system offered a much needed service to alert players to possible risks or provide any additional information needed for a successful Dungeon raid.

Of course, the system does not spoon feed you all the necessary information, from one to ten. Plus, the vague or peculiar language used by the system may be slightly offensive…In any case, Users learned to pay attention and follow these guiding messages if they wished to survive.

So….if the [New Discovery] message renewed after discovering this corpse (and if I wanted to safely leave this disgusting dungeon), I had no choice but to investigate this body.

I didn't dare touch the body with my bare hands, so I held onto the tip of the broken staff I had found earlier and cautiously poked at the body. After a few nudges, I was sure that this was indeed an unmoving corpse. As it didn't seem particularly dangerous, I carefully walked a bit closer.

The body had almost completely decomposed into a white skeleton, but I still had no desire to see its face. Instead, I turned away from its head to the rest of its body and discovered something black wedged into its back.

Hmmm….This black wedge must have dealt the fatal blow? The size and location…the attack must have shattered the spine….

"Did a monster do this?"

! A New Discovery (3)

The discovery of the black wedge once again updated the system's discovery message to (3). I brought the light closer to the wedge and disturbed it with the broken staff…but the message was not further renewed.

"Urgh, I guess I have to take it out."

Eventually, with a disgusted expression, I managed to pull out the wedge. Although the corpse was mostly decomposed, it was still quite creepy to grab something stuck in a dead body.

For a moment, it seemed like my efforts were in vain. As soon as the heavy wedge was extracted, it suddenly became ash and dispersed into the air. The body, starting from the tips of its toes, began to slowly collapse as well.

It felt like watching a mirage.

Just what did this mean?

The conditions needed to summon a vengeful specter has been fulfilled.

As soon as the wedge finished disappearing, a message suddenly popped up, informing me of my achievement. Everything became dark.

Replaying the memory of the deceased: ‘Seo Dawon.’

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: Part 3 of 3 of the turbo updates! Meeting the dead body of the ML is ~technically~ meeting ML right? >.<

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Chapter 16

Chapter 16

<I> paused while perusing <my> skill window and turned around. [1]

There was a peculiar noise not far from here. When <I> failed to utilize a skill, Olim, who was covering my back, asked “What’s wrong?” She also turned her head, wondering what caught <my> attention.

“Is there another party here today besides ours?”

“Huh? I doubt it?”

“Hey! Seo Dawon! What are you doing spacing out!” What an ill-tempered guy. As soon as <I> tried to listen to the noise more carefully, <I> was distracted by Woo Ragi’s husky shout.

<I> turned back towards the front, forehead wrinkling. The first thing <I> saw was Ragi blowing away the Death Knight past the last Guardian Boss Monster of the room. White, transparent blades connected together by something string-like flew around as he brandished his echo blades.

Though <I> didn’t think that my attention was swayed all that much to warrant such racket from my party members, it was true that the interweaving timing of spells was sensitive. Missing that window of opportunity would be annoying.

“Gravity.”

As the staff glowed green, a magic circle quickly surrounded the Boss Monster’s, [Lich Lord], and his summoned Death Knights’ feet. As soon as the guild members saw the magic circle, they each threw one last blow

towards the monsters they were confronting and agilely escaped the immediate area.

Soon afterwards, the gravity skill was invoked. The skeletal Death Knights crashed to the floor as if they were nailed to the ground by an invisible hammer. The Lich Lord had accurately perceived that <I> was the source of the magic and sent a curse <my> way. However, the attack was canceled long before it reached my body as Kim Olim blocked its path with her shield.

Then, one of Jo Chan-young's summoned Kirin bit the boss on the shoulder–the shoulder connected to the hand holding the staff. The weight of the Kirin toppled the Lich over; his body leaned precariously, tantalizing victory with his his movements.

"Ha…..Really boring. So boring."

Even in this situation, no one could relax.

In particular, Kim Olim next to <me> was subconsciously releasing a string of complaints under her breath. Everyone could relate to her sighs. <I> was similarly exhausted.

No matter how many times we brought the Lich Lord's HP to zero, he revived and gnawed away at our stamina. Just earlier, Hitman Eun Ji's most powerful skill, [Scud Genocide] had shattered his skull. The Lich Lord simply faltered for a moment before his headless body regenerated his head with an unpleasant chant.

Eun-ji was about to approach him once again, but <I> gave her a signal to step back. She bit her lips but complied. <We've> already confirmed that <our> firepower was spent in vain like pouring water into a bottomless pit. <I> no longer wanted to waste stamina with useless attacks.

However, the issue still persisted and there seemed to be no appropriate response. <We> had claimed victory every time he revived, but <we> were reaching our physical limitations.

According to the “Scenario,” the Lich Lord was a resurrected wizard–a typical undead that held a human-skull staff in his hand.

When he first died and resurrected, <I> was a bit annoyed but had no further thoughts. This type of pattern was quite typical for an undead. Considering the dungeon’s infamous name and difficulty, this resurrection gimmick wasn’t too unbelievable.

But when the Lich Lord resurrected over three times, something felt out of place.

We definitely knocked him down several times with all the force our bodies contained. The first killing blow was dealt by a holy attribute summon–very effective against the undead. Jo Chan-young, a special summoner, had torn apart the souls of the undead in the previous stage with his Kirin and Phoenix, casting [Sacred Sanctuary] to embolden his summons.

However, a minute after the dust had settled, a message [The Lich Lord has resurrected] popped up. This time, <I> immediately attacked with a high level spell: [Flame Nightmare]. (<I> had upgraded the skill by adding the holy attribute to it before the boss battle).

Even still, he had resurrected. Faster than the first time he died….

Next, at the very front of the party, Woo Ragi, the Weapon Master, flicked his chain sword. He pointed out a rich purple heart in the middle of the lich’s skeletal ribs and suggested that the heart might be the core. This time, Ragi tore out the Lich’s eyes, and Eun-ji, the assassin, buried her arms into his chest and crushed the pulsating heart.

This time, the Lich Lord seemed truly agitated. He gave off an ear-splitting scream–several pottery around the room broke. <We> were sure that the raid was completed. However, the system did not award us the reward items; a minute later, “The Lich Lord has resurrected” message reappeared.

Since then, <we've> attacked countless times, destroying everything <we> could. The heart, eyes, head etc…all of which are usually a boss's weaknesses. The party had even destroyed prominent structures or items in the room, just in case.

Nevertheless, the Lich continued to revive.

Less and less time was spent for the resurrections. After the fourth death, the boss spent less than a minute dead despite the party's great efforts.

Even though the guild members were all rankers, they were still humans first. <Our> limits continued to loom closer. Jung Garam, the team's "Special Hunter," offered to look through the previous rooms, searching for a missed clue. It would be unwise for Garam to move alone, so the team's healer, Bae Jaemin, decided to accompany him.

Until Garam and Jaemin returned, <we> decided to attack in rotations, saving as much physical strength as possible. Olim and I did not attack, and were instead closely scrutinizing the Lich Lord from a close distance.

We had agreed on this plan believing that someone of Garam's caliber would be able to return within an hour. However, the two did not return for at least 10 more resurrections.

"Why isn't Garam accepting the team's messages?" Olim said.

"He's not reading them?"

"Yeah….Are they being attacked by something? I can't reach Jaemin either…."

"We have to wait, then."

Though Kim Olim still looked worried, she closed the message window and began to fix her weapon. Ragi threw a spear at a Death Knight that attempted to sneak attack him from the side.

Originally, Ragi in his top condition would not have allowed a monster to come so close….but without Garam, he had to fill the main damage

dealing position all by himself. So, he was moving around nonstop, and it was obvious that, of all the party members, he had expended the most stamina.

<I> looked at Olim, wondering if <I> should send her to Ragi's side. Mages are vulnerable to close ranged attacks, so normally <I> would need a melee attacker by my side…but Ragi's strained breathing weighed on <my> mind.

"Should I go?" As soon as Olim and <I> made eye contact, she immediately understood <my> concern. At my nod, she ran off with heavy footfalls to Ragi's side. Ragi said nothing, but he stepped behind her shield, 'Holy Night,' and breathed deeply.

"Dawon-hyung! There's only four minutes left to operate on the golem's clock" After Olim left, Kyung-sik slid by <my> side.

At his words, <I> gave him a hurried glance. He was riding a gigantic Golem ravaged by sword attacks. The countless slash marks onto its gas chamber frame made it look quite shabby.

The golem was summoned earlier to destroy all the buildings and formations in the room, but it was so noticeable that the Lich Lord and the Death Knights chose to focus the majority of their attacks on it. The golem was already broken in so many places; <I> don't think it'll be useful to hang onto it for another four minutes…

"Let's explode it."

"What?"

"You said that there were four minutes left. I'll pay for the repairs."

"Aww…You're too much. It's going to take so much time to rebuild it…." Kyung-sik whined, but the situation was too dire. He steeled himself and moved the golem through the controller to less than a stone's throw away from the boss's side.

Upon receiving <my> signal, all the guild members ran as far as possible from the golem. As soon as Kyung-sik pressed the skull button on its controller, the shell of the golem cracked, and bright light leaked out through the spaces. Perhaps the Lich Lord grasped the danger, he tried to run away, but the golem collapsed onto the lich's body, pinning it down. The golem exploded with a deafening boom; its surroundings became shambles.

The Deaths Knights that were flailing wildly paused for a minute, turned into ashes, and scattered in the wind. Since the army was fueled by the Lich's mana, when the source disappeared the summons were also destroyed as well.

<We> all collectively held our breath and watched the battlefront.

Will he be revived again?

.

Bae Jaemin: Dawon Hyung

Just then, Bae Jaemin's message in the party chat had arrived.

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: Today I learned giraffes are "holy" summons…

Footnotes

1. This is Seo Dawon, btw. I hope that's clear.

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Chapter 17

Chapter 17

<I> directed Olim to watch the place where the Lich Lord would reappear when he is resurrected and ordered her to wait for an attack. Afterwards, <I> turned back to the message window to reply.

Seo Dawon: Where are you? What about Garam?

Bae Jaemin: Garam is…

Bae Jaemin: He’s really seriously injured

To make matters worse, he reported that Jung Garam had been injured. <I> had an ominous looming feeling.

Seo Dawon: How bad?

Bae Jaemin: I think we should leave

Bae Jaemin: He hurt his arm and eyes, and he’s bleeding a lot

Seo Dawon: The ‘Complete Recovery’ spell isn’t working?

Bae jaemin: My spell is still on cooldown

Bae Jaemin: I’m going to activate the emergency escape, so please approve it

Seo Dawon: Okay

Seo Dawon: And you? Are you alright?

Bae Jaemin: Yeah

Soon, an announcement appeared: [“Bae Jaemin” has requested emergency evacuation]. <I> approved it and began to ready Garam’s escape kit as well.

“…..!”

But at that moment, something felt odd. <My> sharp intuition alerted <me> to something approaching from the back.

“Kuh-urk….”

But when <I> noticed this, <I> had already allowed that oddity to approach too close for safety. As if someone had shot a fire arrow into <my> back, a searing pain had shot through <my> spine, and <I> felt my vision grow dim.

Kim Olim, who noticed me fall, turned around and roared, “Seo Dawon-!”

All the other guild members turned their heads towards <me> at Olim’s shout. <I>, too, managed to stay awake and not faint at the shock of her voice and collapsed where <I> stood.

Perhaps the blow was truly deadly, <my> arms lost all sensation. Something was wedged into <my> back…What is it? Is this the boss’s new attack pattern?

“…Just as Lee Do-jin assured me. No matter how sensitive my opponent may be, he can’t possibly perceive ‘this’ from the back.” The shadow behind <me> did not belong to a monster. “Hello, Seo Dawon.”

The attacker placed a foot on <my> neck; her frivolous voice that promised violence was one that <I’ve> heard before. The attacker leaned over and made eye contact with my faltering eyes, as if to jog <my> memory.

“Long time no see?”

“Lim Jisoo! What have you done!” Kim Olim shouted in anger before <I> could respond.

A loud ‘crash’ could be heard not far away. Had Olim thrown her spear at Lim Jisoo?

Lim Jisoo suddenly placed greater pressure on <my> neck after Olim’s attack. Perhaps she wanted to threaten Olim for daring to harm her. She must have expected some sort of flailing from <me>, but, even if she were to break <my> neck, <I> didn’t intend to give her the satisfaction from any unseemly outward show of pain.

Lim Jisoo clicked her tongue while looking at me and removed her foot. “You’re still no fun.”

“Lim Jisoo…Have you finally gone insane?” <I> croaked.

Obviously Lim Jisoo and <I> despised each other, but to the point of attacking <me> from behind? With the intent to kill? If news spread that she attacked a guildmaster during a raid, Lim Jisoo’s life as a respected ranker would be over. Had she really gone insane?

Perhaps she was anticipating <my> question–perhaps she read the confusion on <my> face–Lim Jisoo opened her mouth with a triumphant smile. “Seo Dawon. Didn’t I warn you, as your sunbae [1] ? Remember?”

<I> bit back <my> questions as there was no value to answering this madwoman, but Lim Jisoo seemed to be intoxicated. She continued as if she didn’t care about <my> response with exaggerated gestures and raised voice.

“I told you to stop putting on airs, stop pretending to be good, and live modestly. This is your karma.”

Her words were nonsense, but <I> felt the atmosphere change as soon as Lim Jisoo finished speaking.

Though <I> could only see the guild members' feet from my prone position, their stance had changed. Somehow the sound of Ragi's chain sword clanking against itself seemed quite creepy.

The Lich Lord's resurrection spot seemed quiet, so something else must have emerged. And the guild members were nervous enough to change into defensive positions to deal with it…<I> wanted to see what Lim Jisoo had summoned, but this crazy bitch crouched in front of <me>, blocking <my> line of sight.

With a deranged smile, she whispered, "First of all…Watch your annoying guild members die."

As soon as those words left her mouth <I> heard a wet tear–the fishy smell of blood assaulted my nose. <I> didn't hear anyone screaming, but <I> knew–or rather <I> felt–that someone in the guild was mortally wounded or killed.

<I> looked Lim Jisoo square in the eye and said, "Step aside, pig bastard, so I can watch."

Lim Jisoo's smiling face hardened; her cheeks twitched. She grabbed <me> by the collar and raised <my> dangling body into the air. "You still don't understand your situation, do you?"

Then, Jisoo turned her body to the side, as if she were putting on a performance.

<I> knew better than anyone else the present state of the guild members. <We> were already exhausted from trying to defeat the Lich Lord and his Death Knights, and Bae Jaemin, the team's only Priest, had left the dungeon.

Above all, <I> was the guild's biggest firepower, but <I> was held in Lim Jisoo's hands, collapsed and useless. <I> had no idea what Lim Jisoo had stabbed into <my> back, but because of it, the mana circulation in my body was disrupted. <I> couldn't even call upon <my> Mage abilities to change this dire situation.

To drive <us> into this corner…This attack must have been a thoroughly researched and prepared trap that must have been conceived long ago. However, Lim Jisoo could not have accomplished all this on her own; <I> needed to uncover her partner in crime.

Lim Jisoo finally responded to <my> provocations and swept her arms across the battlefield. <I> could finally see our enemy…or should <I> say enemies.

“How do you feel? Two of the nation’s top three guilds joined hands to demolish you Red Lotus eyesores.” Though her tone was flippant, as if she were joking, the battlefield corroborated her words.

Only eight of the Red Lotus guild members participated in the <Tower of Command> raid. Two of them, Garam and Jaemin, were absent, and <I> was captured by Lim Jisoo. Therefore, only five members were standing in the field.

At a rough glance, over 50 people were surrounding <us>. Moreover, a good portion of them were guild rankers that were so famous that anyone in <our> country, even those living under rocks, could recognize them.

First of all, the famous [Red Dragon] guild stood out because of the members’ cliche uniforms embroidered with red dragons. The guild itself was established by gang members; both users and ordinary folk began to call them loan sharks. It is said that the chairman of the group, Koo Kyungman, currently has the most cash in Korea; he was the king of dirty money.

Of course, <I> had no reason to get entangled with a punk like Koo Kyungman who only played around at clubs or expanded his dirty business. And, it wasn’t as if Kyungman had hid the bloodthirst in his eyes when he came to <our> guild to solicit personal jobs.

But the man had a shrewd brain on his shoulders, <I> didn’t think he’d dare gamble being the Red Lotus’s enemy. Worse, the guildmaster, Kyungman, didn’t send one of his officer underlings but instead came personally to fight. He stood in the center of a group of Red Dragons,

wearing a childish cape (the symbol of the Red Dragon guild master) draped over a body as thin as anchovies.

He was a Mutuga [2], a class that used gauntlets. The gauntlets were always infused with poison, befitting his treacherous nature, and, predictably, he would only use black weapons. After briefly pacing the battlefield, he locked onto one target and began doggedly chasing.

That target was Kyungsik, the alchemist who had just lost his Golem. Koo Kyungman had a nose like a hunting dog; he had correctly chosen the weakest target.

Fortunately, Kyung-sik, who had noticed him chasing, quickly turned to run and narrowly avoided an attack from behind. The chase was momentarily suspended when Olim threw a shield at Kyungman. Kyung-sik quickly ran by Olim's side.

But the real reason for the halt was quickly revealed: Kyung-sik had already fallen victim to the insidious poison on the gauntlet. He collapsed in Olim's arms, face turning blue and gushing black blood. Olim's expression contorted.

TN: Thanks for joining me for this chappy~

Footnotes

1. Sunbae = Senpai/an upperclassman or senior at work
2. This is a reference to dragon quest, a fighter/brawler base class

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Chapter 18

Chapter 18

“Oh? One’s dead already? He was an Alchemist who was kicked out of Virtuoso workshop for an accident and crawled under your protection, right?”

“…..”

“There’s a rumor in our industry that Virtuoso had lobbied at least 10 lawsuits on this matter, but you guys wouldn’t budge…Is that why? Virtuoso supplied 20 assassins–all premium–for this ambush.”

“……”

<I> ignored Lim Jisoo’s fluttering chatter and turned towards Ragi, who was struggling 10 v 1.

It was hard to recognize his face as Ragi was already covered in blood. He was surrounded by assassins wielding daggers or chain rogue knives.

Swordsmen usually have a difficult time countering assassins. Furthermore, all 10 assassins gave no regard to their own body and slashed at Ragi; even if Ragi were to block one attack, two more would be stabbing at his flank. The assassins could afford to be careless with their health as they had the support of high-ranking priests standing behind them.

That group of blue-robed Priests, backing up the assassins, belonged to one of the top three guilds in Korea, [Opera]. At the center of the group of healers stood Ryu Hyerin, a highly regarded Priest Ranker. She wore a blue sapphire circlet which signalled her status as one of the deputy guild masters of Opera.

“Ah, Ragi, you bastard. I wanted to tear your pretty face apart myself… Between you and him, I had su~ch a hard time deciding on my opponent,” Lim Jisoo sighed.

Right after Lim Jisoo’s sarcastic remarks, Ragi finally was brought to his knees. Even though he fought with fierce and shining eyes, an assassin with a dagger that shone like red fireworks finally succeeded in slitting his throat.

When <I> saw the ownerless chain sword spinning on the blood-soaked ground, I closed my eyes for a brief while. <I> choked with the onslaught memories of our 10 years of history.

But <I> didn’t have the time to be shaken. Swallowing the bloody vomit rising from <my> esophagus, <I> asked Lim Jisoo, “How did you… cooperate with Opera?”

Lim Jisoo laughed uproariously at <my> question. Her face was one of the most joyful and excited faces <I’ve> ever seen, yet it was also a face that <I> couldn’t help but despise. Still, <I> couldn’t take my eyes off this hateful woman.

“What if I told you that if we’re successful, after scenario 2-1 we’ll sign exclusive contracts with the government?”

“…..”

“You’re not curious to know where the information leak came from? We should solve this mystery before you die~.”

<I> was ready to play 20 questions, but a name crossed my mind, unbidden, while staring at her relaxed expression. <I> recalled the acute sense of disharmony before we were ambushed by Lim Jisoo. The fog in <my> brain gave way to lucidity.

“Was it Bae Jaemin?” The moment <I> spoke his name, <I> no longer needed Lim Jisoo’s confirmation. <I> somehow knew this was the truth.

This situation could not have happened if Bae Jaemin was not the traitor. The sense of wrongness extended to the events after <our> conversation in which he requested emergency evacuation. ‘Why was Bae Jaemin, not Jung Garam who was injured, the first to exit the dungeon after approval?’ <I> was too focused on Garam’s injury and didn’t think to double check Jaemin’s intent.

Lim Jisoo laughed shadily and began strangling <my> neck. “Kya~ Your intuition is too fast. But how do you feel? How do you feel about being dealt such a big blow?”

<I> closed <my> eyes without responding to her provocations.

There was still one mystery left unsolved: Bae Jaemin’s motive to betray the Red Lotus Guild.

Of course, Bae Jaemin was known to play politics within the guild. Though he looked obedient, <I> knew he didn’t have such a docile and temperate personality….However, what ranker had no ambition? His politics were acceptable and somewhat encouraged in the ranking community. It was all the more incomprehensible when <I> recalled his previous behavior within the guild. Why would he work so hard to carve his own place in a guild that he would destroy later on?

Furthermore, with his full cooperation, <our> guild would be the first to enter scenario 2-1 after clearing the <Tower of Command> Dungeon. Red Lotus would also have won those elusive “exclusive rights.” From Bae Jaemin’s perspective, wouldn’t it have been more beneficial to continue to work hard within Red Lotus rather than to cooperate with other guilds to set such a laborious trap?

What’s the point of killing all the people he’s gotten close to–those he faithfully called “hyung”–and turning traitor? Just what did Lim Jisoo promise him?

However, the one who could best answer these questions, Bae Jaemin, was absent. <I> probably won’t find answers in this lifetime.

Therefore, instead of agonizing over Bae Jaemin, <I> decided to sear the images of <my> dying guild members, one by one, into <my> brain.

Lim Jisoo tried to insult <me> further, but saw that there was no use–<I> was no longer paying attention to her verbal abuse. She gathered strength in the hands that held my neck and murmured melancholically, “It’s a shame to kill you so peacefully, but….Tch. I’m running out of time.”

Those were the last words <I> heard while alive.

Playback of the deceased ‘Seo Dawon’s’ memories finished.

“Hurk!”

When ‘I’ returned to reality, I held my chest and took long, drawn-out breaths, as if I had dived deeply and just returned to the surface. I couldn’t speak for a long time and felt as if I was going to vomit. My hands clutched at my galloping heart.

What I just saw….What the hell was that?

Logically, I knew that these memories were not my own…but my body trembled as if I were the one who had been murdered. My will was not strong enough to quell the tremors. It felt a bit like I had woken up from a deep hypnosis–like waking up from a several-months long hibernation.

My brain ached, as if the neurons inside were shattering.

The headache reminded me of Seo Dawon’s last moments; he died feeling the pressure between his ears rise until almost bursting as he tried in vain to breathe while Lim Jisoo strangled him. Eventually, I fell prone, vomiting on an empty stomach.

“Urk…..”

I hadn’t eaten since breakfast, so all that came out of my mouth was spit and gastric juices. However, I still felt uncomfortable, as if I had chugged a bottle of vinegar nonstop. I couldn’t recall how many times I retched until my insides stopped twisting in pain and calmed down.

But relief was short lived. No longer worried about my stomach, I became incredibly depressed.

What I experienced was real.

These were Seo Dawon's true memories.

I had briefly experienced a vast kaleidoscope of Dawon's emotions before death. Before our consciousness separated, I saw a vision of the high ideals he wanted to achieve and the great efforts he made to fulfill his dreams. I felt his bitter tears of regret as he saw these hopes fade before his eyes. After he and I were completely separated, my heart and mind felt vaguely empty and dizzy.

To see someone live their life to the fullest at every moment, and to see him lose everything in vain…..Life, what the hell? Does God even exist…?

Moreover, he was falsely accused even after his death. Adding up the articles, the special interviews, and the numerous comments that popped up while searching for information on this Dungeon, Seo Dawon had also been socially murdered.

"Is this why…the skill is called a 'vengeful ghost contract'?"

I contemplated the golden [Vengeful ghost contract] button that had just recently activated.

If I press that button…Wouldn't I meet 'Seo Dawon's' vengeful spirit? I have no idea what type of contract will be established, but I imagine it would be similar to Lackey, my summoned skeleton…

However, apart from the general compassion I have for his death, I felt a surge of fear. I would be forcing someone who used to be another User, like me, to be my summon…That's a bit repulsive. And, all the people who betrayed Seo Dawon are living quite well now.

Bae Jaemin, who betrayed the Red Lotus guild from within, had become one of the most well-known Rankers in the nation. I had no idea about Lim

Jisoo, but I assume that she lived without any problems after the disaster was misrepresented to the public. And the two guilds, [Red Dragon] and [Opera] were still quite famous.

In comparison, I'm a low level Necromancer with no guild nor stats… Seeing Dawon's outstanding ability before his untimely death, I think he'd be quite the powerful servant…But, to be honest, I wasn't sure I would be able to alleviate his grudge quickly even if I were to revive him. First of all, I'm not even at the level to support him in his revenge.

Unfortunately, I was the best at pinpointing the worst aspects of any situation.

TL: Somehow I feel like it's super sweet that Dawon chose to focus on the images of his dying guildmembers instead of focusing on those betrayed him.

Also: I'm currently going into my finals prep stage so I've been a bit slow in TLing (I've got chapters stocked up though). The hope is that I'll be able to update faster when I'm finally doing my summer dissertation work and I'm not on a schedule~

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Chapter 19

Chapter 19

Even if I were to contract with him…it would be a problem if those that murdered Dawon were to find out about the resurrection. If I were a traitor, I wouldn't be kind enough to leave the Necromancer that revived my target alone.

All that's left is to spread the truth behind these memories…

But will the process be smooth-sailing? I felt sympathy for Seo Dawon, but no one would seriously believe me if I claimed, "The Red Lotus guild members were ambushed and killed!" I was a fly compared to his enemies; both their status and strength were on a different level.

Could there be someone more unfortunate than Seo Dawon….Even if he tried to be a shining beacon for other Users and accomplished such great things, everything was distorted due to the violent manipulations of his opponents.

I knew these unfortunate dealings were hard to untangle. Even if the matter catches someone's attention…I have to fight alone to provide evidence of the massacre…

After much contemplation, I closed the status window and tightly shut my eyes.

'I'm so sorry, Seo Dawon-nim…I'll come back later when I'm strong. Then, I'll find a way to alleviate some of your resentment….' Of course, I

couldn’t vocalize such cowardly thoughts, so I quietly made a promise within my heart. I began to search for an exit from this cave.

“–that. You’re so….”

Just then, I heard loud, echoing voices from above.

Those voices probably belong to other Users? Perhaps from a party trying to clear the <Tower of Command>? Maybe I could ask for their help to safely escape the dungeon…

“I’m really working my ass off [1] coming here just because you’ve been having disturbing dreams–you insane fool.”

“…..”

“It’s not like you’re a fortune teller or a prophet.”

When I saw the faces of the two people leading a large party, I hid myself under the stairs automatically.

Bae Jaemin, sporting one black eye patch, appeared with a gaunt, thin body, and his signature black gloves. The woman with a dark bob hair cut, wearing shiny robes and carrying a colorful staff, was most definitely Lim Jisoo. Her husky voice carried well from above.

Though this was the first time I had personally beheld Lim Jisoo’s face, her maniacal smile while strangling Seo Dawon was still vivid in my brain. As soon as I saw her, my head was overwhelmed by another’s foggy memories, and I hid myself instinctively…After I came back to my senses, I didn’t dare leave my hiding place.

So, I unintentionally eavesdropped on their conversation.

“After it’s over, everything would be dissolved in hydrochloric acid. Have you ever seen me court the devil and leave a mess for this sort of business?” Lim Jisoo meaningfully said to Bae Jaemin, as they arrived at

the vast, open space. Hearing Lim Jisoo talk about “hydrochloric acid,” I thought it would be prudent to continue to hide underneath the stairs.

Suddenly, Bae Jaemin quieted Lim Jisoo and sat down in the middle of the floor and began sweeping the ground with his ungloved hand. “…Until just a moment ago, someone was standing here.”

His words made my heart flutter madly.

No way…did he notice my footprints? Fortunately, the two didn’t look my way and shone their light on a space a small distance from where I hid.

Lim Jisoo, who changed her mood at Bae Jaemin’s words, began looking in earnest as she held her lantern. I could only hold my breath, suffocating myself in fear.

Looking at his partner’s alert back, Bae Jaemin nervously said, “I told you, someone definitely got here first! Things were weird from the entrance of the hard mode route. There’s supposed to be a ‘Guide’ buff on this route…Someone must have come here before us. That person stole the ‘Guide’.’’

Lim Jisoo’s face distorted, “You’re saying someone knows the correct path? Whoever it is, they’re quite stealthy.”

“I don’t think they’ve entered the boss’s room yet….Hmm, it seems like a little rat found their way through…”

After speaking, Bae Jaemin suddenly began walking in my direction.

No way, did he see me? The light came from his back, so I couldn’t properly discern his expression. However, my body froze at the thought of being discovered.

Bae Jaemin suddenly shone his lantern over me. The movement was so unexpected, I almost made a reflexive noise, however, my whole body stiffened and couldn’t move. Bae Jaemin stared in my direction for a long time without speaking.

Was my body paralyzed?

Something was strange.

Bae Jaemin continued to shine his light on me quietly. But he did nothing further, to the point where I wondered if he was aiming to blind me.

In addition, I suddenly couldn't hear any sound; I felt a sense of wrongness, as if time had stopped. Eventually, I opened my mouth and half shouted, half prayed, "Save me!" However, Bae Jaemin and Lim Jisoo were both quiet.

–You want to get away from here safely?

At the end of an unnatural silence, someone asked me a question.

The voice was low pitched and captivating.

And, the owner of the voice had pinpointed my current most desperate desire…

I didn't hear this voice through my ears, but, instead, the voice directly spoke inside my head, as if I was experiencing an auditory hallucination.

I hesitated to respond…After a prolonged silence, I couldn't hear the voice anymore, and, simultaneously, I could no longer feel the blinding, burning light in my eyes.

Eventually I couldn't handle the discomfiting quiet and opened my eyes. For now, I wanted to see who had talked to me.

But, when I opened my eyes, I couldn't see Bae Jaemin nor Lim Jisoo who had just been standing in front of me. The texture of the wall that had been pressing into my back vanished as well. It felt as if I was cut away from the previous room and taken, alone, to some inter-dimensional space?

"……W-what? Where am I?"

The area or location was completely unfamiliar. I seemed to be standing alone in a dark space enveloped by material that glistened like glass.

It felt a bit like being flung into space?

A subtle light was seeping out from underneath my feet; looking down, I saw a magic box inscribed with elaborate patterns. I was standing on top of the box's network of cogs moving in unison.

–My soul is trapped in this place.

It seems that this voice transported me to this most peculiar place, separated from the flow of time and space.

It was the same voice that had earlier asked if I wanted to escape. I looked into the direction of the voice, trying to find the owner, but was unsuccessful.

Eventually, I shouted into the void, "W-who are you!"

–Who do you think I am?

The voice seemed amused, as if his identity should be obvious.

Of course, I had a hunch in my head. But…I swallowed my pooling spit and opened my mouth, cautiously hoping that the voice would deny my words.

"Seo Dawon-ssi…..?" [2]

–That's right.

Damn, of course!

Of course, the only one who can engineer this sort of situation is Seo Dawon's vengeful ghost. His blunt affirmation made me crumple into myself. Though to me his spirit was invisible, Dawon spoke as if he could see me.

–Was my answer so disappointing that you would cry in despair?

“That’s….No, it’s not that I don’t like it, but….”

I hurriedly fixed my expression, but Seo Dawon had not spoken much since. I had no idea what to say to a vindictive specter–no idea how to convince him to let me leave safely–so, I decided to wait until he spoke again.

Of course, Dawon will want to create a contract with me….But I had no desire to walk that inevitable thorny road afterwards…No matter how much the other may wheedle me, I wanted to say “I’m only level 42, so partnering with me will only result in your loss!”

However, even after a long wait, the voice did not speak again. In the end, I couldn’t stand the silence, so I asked, “Where is this?” I first needed to get a proper stock of this situation.

–…….

“U-um, Hello?”

–Didn’t I say that it’s where my soul is trapped?

He answered frustratingly late, as if he had been thinking about other matters for a while. Furthermore, his answer didn’t seem sincere.

What am I supposed to glean from an answer like that? Just today I learned that Users who die filled to the brim with regrets can become vengeful specters. But, I calmed my emotional heart and asked him politely, again. I had no power here, and I needed Seo Dawon’s help.

TL: Surprise chapter! Thanks for joining me ya’ll~ They’re finally speaking O.O

Footnotes

1. The original idiom used here is raising both hands and feet– Essentially giving your all.
2. Ssi is like -san in japanese. Essentially, ssi is like a suffix of respect.

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Chapter 20

Chapter 20

“I’m so sorry…I don’t really understand. I’ve never died before…I mean, this is the first time I’ve ever been to a place like this. I’ve never heard of this space existing….”

–……

“So, if it’s not too much trouble to explain….Can I ask you one thing? Is it possible…for me to return to my previous location?”

–Ah. Don’t worry about that. You’ll be back soon. In about two minutes, even if you wanted to stay longer, you won’t be able to.”

Perhaps in response to my courteous tone, Dawon answered quite sincerely this time. If in two minutes I’ll be sent back even if I wanted to stay….Does this mean the transportation process is automatic?

In addition, I was both confused and relieved that Seo Dawon, contrary to my expectations, had not bothered to pester me into signing a contract.

–By the way, it seems like you’re confident in your ability to run away after these two minutes? I brought you here since you were begging for help, but you’re more relaxed than I thought you’d be.

“Huh?”

–Bae Jaemin and Lim Jisoo were about to chance upon your hiding location. If you return, you'll return to that exact same situation….Is that really okay?

What?

I didn't quite understand what he had said, and my mouth was left ajar. At my stupid face, Seo Dawon kindly explained the situation again, as if he was teaching a child.

–I've pulled you into something we can call my 'consciousness.' In this space, time flows extremely slowly. So, back in the real world, Lim Jisoo and Bae Jaemin are still on the verge of uncovering your location but have yet to make the actual discovery. Unfortunately, I cannot keep you for a limitless amount of time in this spatial distortion; I can only continue talking to you like this for two more minutes.

"T-then if I return…I'm going to run into Bae Jaemin and Lim Jisoo?"

–Most likely, yes?

Contrary to his kind and patient explanation, his responses seemed aloof.

But, according to his explanation, time had been extended just before my impending death…It means that Bae Jaemin is waiting for me after my untimely return.

If you think about the personalities of the two, as seen in Seo Dawon's memories…it would be strange to not doubt my own livelihood in this situation. Before they found me, hydrochloric acid or some other further trouble, they had these kinds of meaningful conversations as well….

Lim Jisoo, who would melt the bodies of the murdered Red Lotus Guild with hydrochloric acid, had a thorough and vigilant personality. I don't know about Bae Jaemin, but Lim Jisoo was truly a shrewd villain. So, with her cruel and meticulous personality, it was clear that she would try to kill me with no regard to any excuses I might make.

Actually, even if I were Lim Jisoo, I would kill myself to stave off further issues in the future. My hiding location was just too suspicious.

I sat down and clutched my head while working through the implications and politics of the situation. At this moment, I recalled the one person that might be able to help me overcome this crisis.

I eagerly shouted to Seo Dawon, though I had no idea where he could be. “Seo Dawon-nim! Then….Is there no way for me to escape safely? Could you return me to someplace different….?”

–No. I’m already dead?

Seo Dawon refrained from answering clearly, again. And, as if to tease me, he sarcastically added –Now, there’s only 1 minute and 10 seconds left.

I called upon him again, feeling like a ritual summoner talking to a deity through a magic circle. I made up my mind–nothing was going to stop me now.

“D-dawon-nim…Then, what if you made a contract with me?”

–A contract?

However, Seo Dawon’s reaction was a far cry from what I had expected.

The contract was the ace up my sleeves, and I thought he’d jump at that chance with glinting eyes….But Seo Dawon responded with a complicated voice, as if he had no expectations nor interest in the matter.

Confused by the unexpected reaction, I hesitatingly stuttered, “I-I’m a Necromancer….” But I got the feeling that Seo Dawon wasn’t particularly listening. His soul seemed to disseminate this aura of ‘Oh really? How interesting. But what does that have to do with me?’

What? Doesn’t he want to jump at this chance…..

An idea crossed my brain like a bolt from the blue.

“Why not? You have to get your revenge! It’s not fair!”

I couldn’t let myself die without a struggle, like a mouse or a bird. I blurted out any explanation I could think of, while feeling like I was clinging onto the invisible hem of Seo Dawon’s intangible legs.

–Revenge? But, my revenge has nothing to do with you, right? And, similarly, your death shouldn’t matter to me either.

“That’s….”

–And if you wanted to sign a contract with me in the first place, you would have immediately summoned me after viewing my memories…I wonder why you suddenly desire that now?

“But, but Seo Dawon-nim had just brought me here…”

–Oh this? This was an unintentional intervention. Vengeful spirits are typically sensitive to a Necromancer’s desire–most want to curry their favor for revival. That’s why I brought you here instinctively. Should I call it an accident? If you want, I can send you back right now.

He answered neatly, saying the process was instinctual. But, strangely enough, I could feel a stinging hostility within his flawless explanation. It’s like he’s laughing at me for daring to broach the subject of a contract…what did he expect from me?

But no matter how hard I thought, I had no other choice. In the end, I could only helplessly ask again, “Do you really have no desire to sign a contract with me?”

–Why? You’re not sincerely invested in my revenge, right?

“It’s…not that I wasn’t invested…Let me explain…I just thought that it was too difficult for me at this moment. So…”

–You think it’s impossible to attain revenge with your current power?

“Yes….”

–Then I should ask. If you have neither the ability nor the will to avenge me…why should I tie myself to your fate? After I died, I was obsessed with my revenge and even missed the chance to reach nirvana.

His words were reasonable, and I was lost for words for a moment.

I was just too foolish. How stupid of me to think I can gamble a ghost's quest for vengeance with my life! So, I tried again, "No! If you could save my life this time….! No matter what happens, I WILL avenge you!"

However, Seo Dawon seemed to have lost all interest and didn't even reply. I felt a cold gaze, as if he didn't care whether or not I would survive on my own power after being flung from this safe space.

"Seo, Seo Dawon-nim! I spoke wrongly! If only you would help me just this once….I'll do my best to help you get even. I-I'll do anything I can. And you ask me, tell me to do…I don't want to die like this. Although I'm so sorry to say I don't want to die in front of a dead person…Still, I'm so scared. And…And I'm really sorry! I'm going to die a dog's death…

–…..

"Maybe my life would have meaning if I became a ranker like you….Every day I've been ignored and underestimated….It's the first time I've entered such a Dungeon and I've made it all the way here…If I die here, no one will know or tell my mother the news of my death…."

I felt like I was speaking to myself; I felt so unbelievably frustrated. I shut my mouth to calm down for a moment but…suddenly, a flood of tears burst from my eyes. Ah! Fuck! I really needed to fix the habit of crying while frustrated.

Apart from embarrassment, resentment deepened within the depths of my heart. To be honest, in this revenge, I'm like a crippled shrimp in a fight between whales. Lim Jisoo, Bae Jaemin, Seo Dawon…my fate–the danger of death–is tied to the swaying whims of people I had nothing to do with just this morning….

Really, this Necromancer is nothing more than a hopeless class. Ah, before this happened, I should have accepted Hong Seung-min sunbae's advice and left the Hub to take the civil service exam….

There was no end to my pessimistic thoughts, and now I was certain that Seo Dawon would never want to contract with a loser like me. When I leave this space, I'll run into Bae Jaemin…should I just beg Jaemin to spare my life? Ah……All sorts of crazy thoughts began to flood my brain before reality struck me.

–Are you finished crying?

Just then, Seo Dawon asked, without hiding the fact that he had been observing me all this while. At his words, I almost cursed at him, but I stood still. It would be accurate to say that I didn't even have the energy to be angry.

In addition, the magic underneath my feet flickered alarmingly. As Seo Dawon said, I would soon be brought out of this space and back to my original location. When I go back, I'll be right in front of Bae Jaemin, right? I should get on my knees and pray…that's all that I can do….

Haa…..Fuck it.

Would he spare a stranger when he was someone who could bear to betray a guild member he had known for several years? Damn. If I knew this would happen, I would have called my mom in the morning.

–Hey. You don't want to die, right?

Suddenly, Seo Dawon's voice, full of vigor, could be heard above my head.

TL: Sorry, this isn't really edited as much by me (because I'm a bit busy today). I'm planning on getting a few chapters out pretty fast soon.

Also, Whew, ya'll wouldn't know this….but I'm being fed dog food from where I am in my stockpiled TLing… Is it possible to want to want more flirting and to also hate it at the same time?

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Chapter 21

Chapter 21

I couldn’t believe my ears….I immediately raised my head. Sudden dazzling light began to flood in beneath my feet, and I had to cover my eyes to protect them.

The magic inscriptions beneath my feet began to burn red–anyone could see that something unnatural was about to begin.

White vines sprouted from the surface of the magic circle and began to climb up my body. I struggled to avoid this strange plant as it began to crawl onto my thighs, but Seo Dawon stopped me. “Stay Still,” he said. I realized that this monstrous plant must be his doing, so I tried to suppress my paranoia.

When the plants had climbed to wrap around my waist, I once again heard Seo Dawon’s voice.

–Are you really going to obey everything I say?

With the goal of the contract in mind, I fervently, with some bewilderment, nodded. “YES! Yesyesyesyesyes!”

–What’s your name?

“I’m Choi–Choi Lee-kyung.”

As soon as the words left my mouth, the vines began to tighten its hold on my hips. At that moment, I discovered that this vine wasn’t made of soft plant material but was closer to hard stone.

It wound and tied my body together like white cord; it completely wrapped around my neck–half threatening embrace, half a noose. A white stem stopped before my nose, and a bud bloomed from the end of the stem. Inside was a strange skull branded with some insignia. The vines that surrounded me started to change. More buds appeared alongside the winding stem, and the branches began to take a skeletal, bony shape.

The huge white bones that embraced my body remained; the rest of the branches began to form shoulder blades, ribs, arms, and a pelvis. At last, two skeletal hands stretched out towards my restrained face and gently grasped my cheeks.

Directly in front of me, I watched as the eye sockets of the skull glowed red, as if a fire had been lit inside the skull itself. The completed skeleton, far taller than me, began to talk.

–Press the contract button in your status window.

-Summon Evil Specters

[Summon – Vengeful Ghosts: Proficiency 0%, Grade: None.]
[Summon – Sacrificial Offering: Proficiency 0.7%, Grade: Lowest Grade]

Summon spirits, through contracts, to serve as your servants. A spirit stronger than the caster may not be able to be registered as a servant, so be careful!

There are two types of contracts: Vengeful ghost summoning and Sacrificial offering summoning. Pressing the button for each summon will start the technique.

When I opened my status window, Seo Dawon’s skull gave me an inexplicable smirk. I didn’t understand the meaning behind his amused expression until he began to comment on my stats.

–You really are remarkable to brave the <Tower of Command> with those specs.

“I planned to be carried by another party….”

–Already talking smart with me?

“S-sorry….”

I had no idea why he suddenly changed his mind and decided to form a contract with me…Additionally, I was just so thankful that he decided to continue with this plan even after seeing my dismal stats; I pressed the [Summon vengeful ghost] button in a hurry.

As soon as I pressed the button, a glowing red air current enveloped the two of us, and, after the sudden airflow died down, a system message in the shape of an old-fashioned parchment, titled [Vengeful Ghost Contract] floated between my body and his skeletal ribs.

–Write your name in the first line, ‘A.’

Obediently, I wrote my name, ‘Choi Lee-Kyung’ in line ‘A’ with my fingers. Next, ‘Seo Dawon’ was clearly written down in line ‘B.’

After our names were inscribed within the parchment, an announcement [Vengeful ghost contract in progress] appeared alongside an ominous locking sound effect.

As agreed, parties A and B have entered into the strongest binding contract until the terms of the agreement have been fulfilled. Until completion of the contract, the contractual relationship between both parties will have priority over any other binding or non-binding agreement.

In the case of a “contract breach,” where the “contract completion” cannot be fulfilled, the party responsible for the revocation will suffer great risk.

The parchment was then populated by a large amount of legal jargon. I quickly skimmed through and was taken aback by the last line.

“Hey, it says that there’s a great risk….”

–If you know what the risk is, will you not go through with the contract?

“Of course not….”

With no further questions, I signed the blank space at the end of the parchment, and Seo Dawon’s ghostly fingers did the same. When both of us finished signing, the parchment shone brightly and updated with the terms of the contract.

[The vow between ‘Choi Lee-kyung (hereafter referred to as “A”) and ‘Seo Dawon’ (hereafter referred to as “B”) are as follows]

1. **A, to the best of their ability, must strive to avenge B. This item shall have priority over all other terms in the contract.**

1. **The contract will automatically expire after revenge has been satisfactorily achieved.**

1. **Party B shall be obliged to protect the safety of Party A– further, B’s ability may be shared with A at A’s request.**

1. **However, A cannot execute absolute commands that would typically apply to his other ‘Servants.’**

1. **A and B will not share experience points.**

1. **Party A is forbidden from limiting B’s activities or agency without B’s consent–such as storing B inside a system storage or leaving B behind over a large physical distance.**

1. **During the contract's duration, if A lets B know of some physical discomfort during the quest for revenge, party B is obliged to yield to A's needs. B shall not make any requests of A beyond his ability.**

1. **Penalties will be imposed if the above terms are not properly observed. Parties A and B have the discretion to mediate penalties between themselves.**

Well, the content was invariably in favor of party "B," Seo Dawon… however, the conditions were better than I had thought. I signed my name underneath, where Seo Dawon's bones pointed.

When I finished signing, the parchment shaped system hologram ripped in half, and each piece dropped into mine and Seo Dawon's hands.

'Is this supposed to go into my inventory?' As I puzzlingly stared at it, the parchment soon dissolved into a red string that wriggled its way to my left hand. The string permeated into my skin and branded itself, in the shape of a ring, on my left ring finger.

Seo Dawon's left ring finger, the same as mine, was also branded as well–like a tattoo ring…I was struck by the system's strange sense of humor. To share a mock wedding ring with a dead man…did the contract really have to mark us in this specific location?

The 'Vengeful Ghost Contract' has been signed.

All conditions of the 'Vengeful Ghost Contract' apply, starting now.

A new servant, 'Seo Dawon,' has been added.

Successfully contracting has greatly increased your level! Please check your status window!

Name: Choi Lee-kyung – Lv55
Class: Low-rank Necromancer
HP – 81, 500
MP – 30,000

Title:

Greenhorn Adventurer – You've tasted the bitterness of life!
<The title 'Greenhorn Adventurer' increases movement speed by 5% while active.>

Key Stats (Top three stat values will be preferentially shown):

Magic: 408
Magic control: 3.4%
Movement speed: 22.7% (+5%)

Skill

— Summon evil specters
[Vengeful Ghost Summon: 100% proficiency. Grade: Intermediate.]
[Sacrificial Offering Summon: 0.7% Proficiency. Grade: Lowest]

Summon spirits, through contracts, to serve as your servants. A spirit stronger than the caster may not be able to be registered as a servant, so be careful!

There are two types of contracts: Vengeful ghost summoning and Sacrificial offering summoning. Pressing the button for each summon will start the technique.

-Summon Low-rank Skeleton (1/1)
-Name of Skeleton (Lackey)

The initial registration of a name in the skill above cannot be later changed. You can summon without any restrictions, even if you are far away from your summoned spirit, if you call their name. (Cooldown time 1 minute 30 seconds)

–Command Servant

Current number of command-able beings: (1/2)

(‘Lackey’ currently has two main skills available.)

–Possession (New!)

When special conditions are met, a servants’ abilities may be used from the body of their master.

–A new servant, ‘Seo Dawon,’ has been added. (New!)

(‘Seo Dawon’ currently has 115 main skills, 33 sub skills, 25 summon skills, and 3 ultimate combat magic skills registered. However, because of the level disparity between servant and master, some skills are currently unavailable and many have had their attack power significantly reduced.)

All my discomfort disappeared as soon as I saw the status window.

Unbelievable. I gained 13 levels?!

Considering how it took half a year’s worth of constant effort, grinding low-level dungeons, to gain 13 levels before, I couldn’t believe how one contract could award so much experience all at once.

My stats have risen a lot as well, and I seem to have gained new skills….Furthermore, my eyes widened at the description that the system attached to Seo Dawon.

What do you mean 115 main skills? Right now I only have about 5….So, even though Seo Dawon himself stood right in front of my eyes, I rushed to enter his status window.

TL: Fast update~ (Can you tell I really don’t want to write my essays?) In any case, congratulations to MC on his marriage~

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Chapter 22

Chapter 22

"Seo Dawon Status Window!"

Seo Dawon – Choi Lee-kyung's servant
Class: Legendary Mage (8th circle)

HP – 45,000,000/45,000,000
MP – 112,000,000/112,000,000
Loyalty: Very Low.
Disposition: Darkness, Wrath, Charisma, Leadership, Wisdom, Artistry, Inspiration, Curse**.**

Title:

Dragon Slayer – violent crazed dragon. A limited title given only to the first warriors to slay the Second Company's ruler, Aestheya**.**
<The 'Dragon Slayer' title increases all physical and magical attacks by 150%>

The Sage of the Magic Tower – A limited title given only to Mages that have created over 100 new styles of magic skills through research**.**
<'The Sage of the Magic Tower' title bestows a 10% increase in intelligence while active.>

Liberator of the Undersea City – A limited title given to those who have completed the main quest scenario of sealing the Succubus Queen Lyris, who pretended to be the ruler of the undersea city of Achilles.
<The title 'Liberator of the Undersea City' gives the user access to the Sunken Gardens.>

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Current mood: ‘Seo Dawon’ has low loyalty, so his inner thoughts are hidden.

Durability: Infinite (If Seo Dawon is attacked for more than its total health, he will be reversed summoned back into Choi Lee-kyung’s personal space, and the user will sustain the overflow damage. Re-summon Cooldown time: 24 hours)

Stats:

Strength +480,000
Magic +1,900,000
Stamina +740,000
Agility +640,000
Luck +330,000
Intelligence +990,000

Magical Critical Damage: 4,345%
Max Magic Damage: 3,004%
Min Magic Damage: 2,245%
Crit Chance: 87.34%
Magic Resistance: 20.41%
Vs. Monster Armor Pierce: 97%
Vs Monster Magic Resistance Pierce: 122%
Magic Skill Cooldown Time Reduction: 86.87%
Probability of Causing Status Effect Confusion with Skills: 33.22%

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Main skills: What follows are the top five most proficient skills that are currently available.

-**Thunder Calling**: Call down a powerful thunderstorm to blow away everything in a given range.

-**Gravity**: Allows you to counter a powerful enemy by manipulating the gravity of the specified target.

– Summon Hellhound: A magic spirit, in the image of a giant dog, made from hell fire. The hound's breath does not dissipate until all of his targets are burned to extinction.

– Chronicle: Summons an ice tempest that freezes everything in a specified category or characteristic.

– Wind Storm: Attack enemies with strong blades of wind.

Enhancement: 'Seo Dawon' cannot be enhanced.

I couldn't pick my jaw off the ground while scrolling through his endless status window. Sometimes high-level Users and Rankers would reveal their own stats on the community 'Ranking Gods,' but they were insignificant compared to Seo Dawon.

Just as I was about to blurt some words of admiration to Seo Dawon, the floor collapsed underneath my feet, and I started to fall into the void.

"AhhhhhHH"

Bright light flooded my view from below, and I tried to turn my head. However, something held me from behind, and my body couldn't move a single inch. The intense light enveloped my vision and body, and, in a moment, I was spat out into a different location.

I couldn't properly see what was in front of me until the light's shine no longer stung my eyes. When my vision settled, Bae Jaemin, holding his lamp with an ambiguous expression on his face, stood before me.

At the sight of the person I had least wanted to meet, I had almost jumped in fear, but someone had caged my back to his front with unyielding strength and quickly blocked my screams.

“Wasn’t there something here, just now?” Bae Jaemin asked Lim Jisoo, as if he couldn’t see me standing there right under his nose.

Lim Jisoo also walked over, as close as Bae Jaemin, and shone her lamp over my body. She simply looked around roughly, once, and shrugged her shoulders. “Nothing’s here?”

“I just saw something over here though….”

“Maybe you saw something like a flickering shadow out of the corner of your eyes?”

If these two weren’t acting, then it seems that I really was somehow hidden from their view. Only then did I stop resisting the powerful hold of the person behind me and nervously watched the two villains slowly wander away. ‘Please, just go quickly…..’

“Nothing’s here.”

“This side is clear too!”

After the rest of their party members reported no strange discoveries around the wide cave, Bae Jamin and Lim Jisoo eventually moved away from where I was hiding. They searched the opposite side and, after finding nothing, climbed back up the stairs.

When the party’s lights completely vanished from view, the hold that tightly bound my body loosened. As soon as the arms around me lost strength, I rushed to escape and look at the person behind me.

And….there stood a stranger–a man–who I had never seen before.

He had a tall stature, covered in a neat, standard combat uniform. His forehead was hidden by calm black hair, and, underneath his bangs, striking red eyes stared at me….He was probably the most handsome man I had ever seen in my life.

I had expected that the solid body behind me would belong to Seo Dawon but….When I saw a normal man, and not a skeleton, I stopped

momentarily.

“I….Who are you?” I asked, warily.

It was better to be vigilant than to be careless.

The man’s lips twisted peculiarly as he heard my question. “Who do you think I am?”

“What? Oh! This voice….”

No way…..Seo Dawon?

“W-what happened?” I retreated, scanning him in disbelief. He was just too different from his skeletal image in that strange spatial distortion.

Seo Dawon glanced over at my body when he saw my suspicious gaze. His eyes dared to ask, ‘What’s wrong,’ as if this change was normal.

Eventually I pointed my finger at him and said, “You were a skeleton just before! But suddenly your face and body….”

“This is how I originally looked, though?”

“……Huh?”

“Stop saying foolish things, and come a bit closer.”

I was a bit furious at being called foolish. However, when he shook his left hand and gestured to mine, I saw the symbol of the binding contract.

No way…. He’s really Seo Dawon?

I mindlessly walked closer, taking in his changed image. He didn’t look like a dead man at all–he looked healthy and alive. Everything felt so strange.

The only peculiarity I could distinguish were his red irises. However, Users generally gained weird characteristics throughout their career, so that

wasn’t too particularly strange.

Eventually, standing nose to nose with him, I still couldn’t spot any oddities. I found it hard to find the correct words to say and just stared at him. Seo Dawon brandished his left hand, drawing my attention to the ring finger. I held his hand and rubbed at the contract crest inscribed into his skin.

Holy…the texture of his hand is quite skin-like.

There was nothing strange about the hand I was touching, except that the temperature is a bit cold….

No way, was his body recreated through the contract….?

“Don’t grope so much…”

“G-grope?!!” My innocent curiosity was stopped in its tracks by Seo Dawon, who began to criticize me with a sour expression.

“Even if I’m your servant, I’ll be in a predicament if you ask that kind of service from me….”

“W-what are you even saying!” My face flushed, and I threw his hands aside, as if they were rubbish.

I felt even more ashamed since I noted how handsome Seo Dawon was when I first saw him. However, Seo Dawon did not tease me any further and, instead, observed our surroundings.

I followed his gaze and looked around the empty expanse. My sputters immediately quieted as I was reminded that this cave was his last resting place. His emotionless face, slowly scanning the area, made me nervous.

“There’s something I need to find here,” he said, suddenly snapping his attention back to me.

My blank and confused face prompted further information. He spread his right palm up and, on top, a vaguely diamond shaped black wedge

floated out. A hologram reproduction.

“You’ve seen this, right?”

“Um…? Yes!”

I’m sure I saw it when I first fell here…maybe Seo Dawon’s corpse….? That’s the same thing that was stuck in his back?

When Seo Dawon heard my mumbling, he informed me of the diamond shaped wedge’s name. “It’s called the ‘Essence of the Vengeful Ghost.”

“The essence of a vengeful ghost…?”

“There’s probably about 6 of these in the Dungeon…I need your help to find them.”

I looked at him, puzzled.

TL: Thanks for joining~ I’m going to Upload ch 23 sometime in the upcoming days, possibly when I’m procrastinating from exams and essays lmao~

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Chapter 23

Chapter 23

“Here,” the former Red Lotus guildmaster said.

I gave a deeply distressed look, my face deathly pale, and stood where he pointed. I observed the ground beneath my feet.

There seemed to be nothing on the floor but sand; however, Seo Dawon was confident, nodding his chin as if to urge me to move faster. I eventually raised a dagger with my right hand over my left palm.

“Haah….” I sighed.

“If you’re scared, I can do it for you?”

“…..It’s fine.”

I was embarrassed at his curt tone and worried that he would make a remark about my incompetence even in small matters. Why must I cut my own hand?

But, as time went on, Seo Dawon’s gaze pressured me into action.

Eventually, I closed my eyes and cut my left palm. Blood seeped from the wound, drop by drop. At first, the pain was tolerable, but, as the sanguine droplets continued to gush out of the wound, my hand began to throb as if it was dunked into boiling water.

It was not a deep wound, but hurting my own body distressed me. I squeezed my fist, trying to wring out more blood, and my palm was soon enveloped in slippery, damp red liquid. The fishy smell of iron wafted through the air, and I touched the ground with that bloodied hand.

“Doesn’t a shallow wound hurt more?” Dawon asked.

“Eugh…..” I sneaked a glare at him. “Quickly, the skill….” I grumbled, timidly.

A sparkling, gold magic circle appeared where my hands touched the floor.

However, as the magic circle emerged, I felt an unpleasant sensation of something licking away the blood underneath my palm, and I reflexively flinched.

“Don’t move,” Seo Dawon warned me; my shoulders trembled. I tried to ignore this unpleasant tickling sensation, holding back my rising nausea.

After suffering through fear of the unknown and stress for a few intolerable seconds, I whipped my hands off the ground after Dawon said “It’s done.” Standing up, I checked my palm. The wound from earlier was still open, but all the blood I squeezed out had vanished. Complicated feelings welled up inside of me. Did something truly lick at my palm? Jeez….

“It’s out.”

I followed his words and looked at the center of the Magic Circle; a black wedge, just like Seo Dawon had shown earlier, was slowly pushing out of the ground.

Soon after, the golden magic circle disappeared, and the wedge laid still on the sand. I reached over to pick up the wedge, and, when my fingers touched its surface, a system message simultaneously appeared.

You have acquired an ‘essence of a vengeful ghost’ that cannot be verified because you have not yet satisfied the conditions.

Gained: An ingredient for summoning Vengeful Ghosts

Further information access is barred due to the low ability of the summoner.

The rank cannot be determined at this time with available appraisal skills, so please refer back to this window at a later time.

“But, I….It says that it’s currently impossible for me to access this information….”

“Just store it in your inventory.”

“Yes…..” I docilely followed his instructions.

Seo Dawon explained further. “You know how my guild members died with me, right?” He asked. The hologram of the black wedge in his hands disappeared when he clenched his grip. I reflexively nodded.

He continued, “I believe they or their memories are also sealed into these ‘Essence of Vengeful Ghosts.'”

Recollections of each fallen member had bubbled up in my memories. Obviously, Seo Dawon was not the sole death that day. If he became a vengeful ghost, then, likely, the other guild members may have encountered the same fate.

“But I haven’t seen any other ‘Essence of Vengeful Ghosts’ other than yours….”

“There’s probably situational requirements to be able to see these ‘essences’,” Seo Dawon stared at me after speaking. I couldn’t help but feel anxious at his mysterious gaze–my neck went stiff from the tension.

“Some of your blood was spilt where I had died,” He said.

“…..Huh?”

“You fell from a high place, yeah? When you hit the ground and injured yourself, your blood seeped into the ground. I think that blood called to my soul, the ‘essence of the vengeful ghost.’ You’re a necromancer, after all.”

Are you saying that the blood of a Necromancer was a necessary medium for a vengeful ghost contract? My mind went blank at this almost unbelievable theory. But, then….why wouldn’t this information be contained in the Necromancer class description or the skill’s status window?

“T-that’s the first time I’ve heard that…”

“You’re probably not privy to this information because you’re low level.”

What could I say in the face of Seo Dawon’s, a top level ranker’s, confidence? I knew nothing of levels nor special qualifications. So, I merely nodded my head as if I understood.

Seo Dawon continued after calmly waiting for my wild thoughts to collect itself. “So, before we escape, we should utilize your blood to revive the Red Lotus guild.”

“Ah….What?!”

My nodding head suddenly froze; I retreated in surprise. No way…Is he expecting me to fall from such a height again? Is this guy crazy?! Regardless of my promise to help achieve his revenge, I don’t want to die for that goal!

“I-I don’t have that many potions right now, and a serious wound would kill me….”

“You don’t have to spill blood until you’re at the brink of death anymore. You have me now.”

Fortunately, he said that he could sense the location of these essences through his skills. It was enough to make a cut on my palm and make my hands slightly damp with blood. Although I nodded my head, when I took the dagger out of the inventory I felt the situation was a bit unfair.

“Wouldn’t you rather have seven servants than just one?” Seo Dawon remarked. His further persuasion eventually broke through my regretful feelings.

With just Seo Dawon…Signing his contract increased my ability and firepower by so much. With guild members led by and personally raised by Dawon…Anyone would think twice before attacking us.

I fiddled with the ‘Essence of a Vengeful Ghost’, emotions entrenched half in anticipation and half in nervousness, and placed it into my inventory. Seo Dawon carefully scanned the floor again and gestured at another spot, “This way.”

Once the magic circle was invoked yet again, I winced before gripping the dagger. The wound on my palm had already clotted, and it was so painful to place a blade on an already existing injury.

By the third slash, my hand hurt so much that I couldn’t hide my groans of pain. I couldn’t bring myself to draw the dagger again. Seo Dawon offered to make the cuts for me….but I thought I’d rather do it myself. My pride persevered through hot stinging tears. From the fourth slash on, I switched to the opposite palm.

Seo Dawon glanced at my crying yet determined face in wonder as we acquired the fifth ‘Essence of the Vengeful Ghost.’ “The last one is someplace else, so let’s go there.”

I began to walk weakly, tingly hands stretched out.

“By the way, how old are you?” Seo Dawon, who was leading the way, suddenly asked.

I gingerly wiped away my tears with the back of my hands, “I’m twenty four…”

Suddenly, Seo Dawon stopped and looked back, “You’re three years older than me?!”

“What?”

“Wait, that’s wrong. It’s been three years since I’ve died. You were born in XX? Then, you’re the same age as me.” [1]

“Huh???”

What kind of bullshit is this?! I thought Seo Dawon was Red Lotus’ guildmaster. What kind of person becomes the guildmaster in their early twenties? In other guilds, the leaders were usually in the 40s or 50s. Younger guildmasters did exist, but they were rare. Especially considering how most famous guilds had older executive officials.

And Seo Dawon…Seo Dawon is incredibly attractive, there’s no way he’s in his early twenties just based on his poise! Plus, he’s unbelievably tall and built for a mage. Three years ago he would have been 21 years old….I just couldn’t believe him; there was nothing innocent or youthful about his image.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“?? Are you telling me that I look old?”

“Ah–No…It’s not that….! Are you really the same age as me?”

“Yeah. But now that you know my age, you’re speaking informally.” [2]

“Um, Sir……”

I couldn’t figure out whether or not he was teasing me–instead I gave him furtive glances out of the corner of my eyes.

Seo Dawon looked at me for a second and then smiled lightly, “It’s good to be the same age. Feel free to speak comfortably.” When he smiled, there was some credibility to his words: the years dropped off his face.

I was emboldened by his smile and rushed to his side. “Were you really born in the year XX?”

“Mhmm.”

“Really?”

“Do I really look old enough for you to continuously ask this annoying question?”

His emotionless voice wasn’t so scary anymore. I couldn’t help but steal secret glances at him as we walked forward, side by side.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Bonus Chapter~ (Thank you the two peeps that gave me Kofi~)
Seo Dawon – blunt and unexpectedly sweet lmao

Footnotes

1. In Korea, being the same age is somewhat intimate. It’s said that friends born in the same year have a special connection. And, furthermore, people born in the same year are not beholden to hierarchies of age.

2. The phrase used is “letting go of your words.” Essentially, in korean, you speak formally to those that are of a higher status than you or older than you. Speaking informally denotes a similar social power level or some form of intimacy

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Chapter 24

Chapter 24

Again…Like this, he looks his age. Perhaps the maturity or leadership is showing through in his facial lines? It's not that he looks particularly *old*….

However, I couldn't tell him that I thought he was older because he was handsome. Instead, I relaxed and grumbled, "No…Because it's the first time we've met…Since you started speaking formally first, I of course thought….that you were much older than me…" [1]

"If you feel the need to adhere to age-based social norms, then you should speak informally."

"It's not that I have any particular strong feelings about this…"

Wow…The way he talked reminded me of a bully. I distinctly recalled some faces in my childhood that were incredibly popular with the girls. That same smiling face would coerce me out of my allowance, promising to pay me back someday. Of course, not a single penny was returned…

"Argh!"

"?"

I was lost in thought with such conflicting thoughts rolling around in my mind. While climbing the stairs, my footing became unstable, and I tripped. Thankfully, Seo Dawon caught me quickly.

However, when I was about to say thank you, I bit my tongue like a fool. I tried to swallow the strange groan I made–the sound that left my throat sounded a bit choked, “Mnngh!”

Seo Dawon, as he pulled on my arm to stabilize me, pointed out, “That’s why you should look where you’re going instead of staring at me.” I had no excuse, so I made sure to stop my eyes from straying to my companion and walked straight ahead.

However, Seo Dawon began to question me, “Hey. Where’s your guild?”

“….I don’t have one.” I said, a bit timidly. This time, I dropped formalities, and Seo Dawon didn’t seem to mind.

“Did you just leave one, or have you never been in a guild before?”

“Who would accept a Necromancer….”

“Then, how long has it been since you’ve arrived at the Hub.”

“About…one year?” While answering, I noticed that Seo Dawon was still holding onto my arm, and I shook it a little. He ignored my weak struggles however, and continued to hold onto me, dragging me up the stairs. I didn’t want to show that I was a loser–I had no immunity to skinship–so I let my arm go limp in his grasp. [2]

“Do you have any friends?”

The delicate atmosphere was shattered by the unexpected attack. I thought he was going to bully me, making fun of my way of life, so I asked him sharply, “What?”

Seo Dawon looked at me curiously while frowning. “I’m asking if you have a friend among the Users. If you have friends or guildmates, wouldn’t it be better to hide something like a Servant?”

“Ah…”

“You also know that my circumstances are a bit complicated. Hiding my existence would be beneficial for your own safety.”

I quickly calmed down after his patient explanation.

Damn…I was embarrassed at how quickly I lost my temper. I answered, “Okay…”

However, soon after my response, Seo Dawon countered, “Judging from your previous reaction, I guess you don’t have any friends? That’s great.” Before I could give an indignant response, he said, “We’re here.” He finally released my arm; I ended up following his lead without saying anything…

* * *

We arrived at the rear end of a gargoyle mural in the middle of the stairs. From afar, it was definitely a solid wall, but, as we got closer, the mural disappeared. In its place, an automatically lit, creepy hallway appeared.

Whether his original personality was so nonchalant–or whether the dead were all so uncaring of their life–Seo Dawon entered the suspicious hallway without fear. I honestly had no desire to enter this long hallway that seemed like it was plucked straight out of a ghost story. However, there was no choice, and I followed my guide, sticking close to his side.

30 minutes later, Seo Dawon stopped in the middle of his tracks. “It’s here.” Once again, it was time for my palm to suffer through another cut.

I gritted my teeth–one last time, and this ordeal will be over. Suddenly, Seo Dawon snatched the dagger I had been holding, “I’ll do it.”

“It’s fine. I’d rather do it myself….”

I imagined that it would hurt more if I let Seo Dawon handle the wound. However, he didn’t back down, “I’ll do it gently.”

I honestly didn’t believe him, but, frankly, whether it hurt or not…I wanted to finish this search quickly. Goosebumps started to appear along the arm just from feeling the heavy weight of the dagger. Eventually, I handed my hand to him and turned my head away–eyes closed tightly.

He then grabbed my hand, touching the side free of wounds. It felt as if he was tickling my palm, teasing the skin, instead of slitting it with a dagger. Wondering about his strange actions, I opened my eyes and looked at him.

“Such a scaredy-cat, huh? How did you dare enter this dungeon?” Dawon said.

“I said I was getting carried—Ah!!”

“So dramatic.”

Like a nurse tricking a child during vaccinations, he tricked me by focusing his attention on an unrelated patch of skin. He cut with the dagger the moment I answered. The pain was definitely less, but it was a little embarrassing to scream in the middle of our conversation.

While the magic circle rose up from the ground, Seo Dawon pressed his hand onto my stiff head. He stroked my hair, committing atrocities against my innocent hairstyle.

“Why? My hair….!”

“I said, don’t move.”

What’s wrong with him? I endured the rising frustration and waited for the magic circle to fade. As soon as the last “Essence of a Vengeful Ghost” rose aboveground, Seo Dawon finally stopped wildly stroking my head and took his hand off.

He gently retreated and picked up the ‘Essence of a Vengeful Ghost,’ on the floor–that last wedge was given to me. Though I was annoyed, I couldn’t take out my temper on someone’s soul, so I carefully placed it in

my inventory. However, this interaction did make me feel like I was the servant to Seo Dawon the Necromancer.

“Is it secured?”

“Yeah.”

My arm had just left my inventory space when I noticed Seo Dawon’s rigid posture. He was no longer teasing me and, instead, narrowed his eyes towards the entrance of the hallway. Curious, I looked in the same direction, but my eyes didn’t notice anything unusual.

“Is there something there? A monster isn’t going to ambush us….right?”

“It’s not a monster….” Seo Dawon tore his eyes from the horizon and looked at me. His gaze made me nervous.

“Then what is it?” I shivered.

“I think it’s another party?”

“Another party….?”

Considering the throng of Users who gathered in front of <The Tower of Command> this morning, it wouldn’t be strange to run into another party. Not only in this Dungeon, but party encounters were quite common elsewhere as well. Minor incidents such as fights, mutual aid, or exchange of information occurred frequently….

Unless the government took special control over the Dungeons for various reasons, these sort of incidents were a common occurrence in decently sized dungeons. Therefore, most Users were eager for their party to be the first to arrive at the reward rooms for these large-scale operations.

Because, under certain Dungeon systems, a party may kill the bosses of several different routes faster than the others. Entry into the reward rooms are barred the moment the boss is killed–this phenomenon is referred to as ‘eating a monopoly.’ [3] This situation wasn’t common, but there’s always

news every month or so about a single party eating all the rewards for a dungeon.

For that reason, the value of a ‘Treasure Hunter,’ whose job is to guide the party, jumped through the ceiling. Since the door to the reward room could very well shut right in front of their noses, rendering all previous efforts vain, the practice of hiring a competent Treasure Hunter in order to reach the reward room in the shortest amount of time had become commonplace.

Nevertheless, such inter-party disputes were endless. Ultimately, the Korean User Association had begun to announce a system of raid application and schedules, so that party raid times would not overlap.

After a Dungeon route’s boss was defeated, the Dungeon would close for about 1 hour and 30 minutes. Any Users inside were also forcibly transported back to the Hub.

Then, when the route reopened, all the traps would be randomly reassigned. All the defeated monsters would be revived; a resurrected monster or boss would not inherit a past incarnations’ memories. In game terms, you could call this a ‘respawn.’ [4]

Any boss or named monster typically respawned in 15 to 40 minutes, similar to the normal field monsters in the routes.

When the party that defeated the boss registers the completion of the route in the User Alert app, the information is shared among all Users. Using their total raid time, the application and researchers would infer estimated Dungeon timelines to ensure that all parties can proceed fluidly.

However, the <Tower of Command> had a three year ban on raids, so the opening was incredibly crowded. If the ban was lifted sooner, it would have been unlikely for so many people to flock to the Dungeon all at once.

In any case, the point of this meandering story is that running into other parties in a large Dungeon was a common occurrence. However, in our

case, running into others could spell disaster depending on who our opponents were.

I asked Seo Dawon in a low voice, “It is Bae Jaemin?”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I feel you MC~ It’s mega embarassing to fall down stairs bc you were staring at someone lmao.

Footnotes

1. Usually, it’s quite polite to speak in formal language to strangers. Once again, this goes into the complex way of deciding age hierarchies. Most same-age friends won’t speak formally to each other.
2. The meaning of loser here is difficult. In the original, the word is ‘jjindda.’ Aka, someone who has no friends nor romantic partner and is often alone in the corner of the room all day. It’s also used for people who are touch-starved.
3. In korea, eating can colloquially mean taking
4. In the original novel, this is called a ‘Regen,’ often commonly referred to as ‘Gen.’ Functionally, the word is the same as respawn. Plus, regen has a different meaning in english game terms, so I’ve replaced it with an english substitute.

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Chapter 25

Chapter 25

“That’s not it…But even if the party is small, they’re a group and you’re alone. It’s better for us to avoid confrontation.”

Well… He has a point. The Tower of Command is so dangerous, and the only one I could fully trust here was Seo Dawon.

I asked, “Should we turn around and leave?” But, he shook his head, as if asking me to wait one moment. There seemed to be more to check out, still.

We waited for about 10 minutes…Finally, I began to see the small silhouettes of people off in the distance.

Huh….?

That large man in the lead….

“Do you know them?” Seo Dawon asked, after seeing my expression.

“I think the man at the front was the person that I paid to carry me through this dungeon: Kim Sangyoon…But he’s too far away to know for sure.”

With great effort I looked again. That impressive size and that signature red hair–I was 90% sure the approaching person was Kim Sangyoon….But, as I had my doubts, I began to retreat for safety.

However, I had overlooked a crucial point: parties consisted of various different classes. And, in these high-level Dungeons, parties most likely contained the highly sought-after Treasure Hunters, essential to a successful raid. Before I could fully identify the other party, something shone over what I presumed to be the Treasure Hunter's head, and the people began to rapidly approach. It was then that I realized that the Treasure Hunter's skill [Hawk Eye] had been activated. Before we could hide ourselves and observe the situation, we had already been exposed.

Fortunately, at a closer look, the other party was revealed to be Kim Sangyoon's group. I did not run away, for I believed that the others would help me escape. After all, I had paid for their guarding services.

However, how should I explain Seo Dawon, next to me…I couldn't think of a good excuse for his presence while also keeping the nature of our contract a secret.

Berserker Kim Sangyoon and his party must have had a long dungeoneering career… [1] Wouldn't some of them recognize Seo Dawon's face?

Even if his identity wasn't revealed, it would be hard for me to say that I had met him coincidentally within the Dungeon–only parties were allowed to participate. Any lie would be filled with widening plot holes, ones too big to ignore…

"What should I say?" I asked.

"About what?"

"About you. I should have put you in my system space before the others used 'Hawk eye'…."

"Me?"

"Yeah…We can't let rumors of your resurrection spread."

However, I could no longer safely say another word: Kim Sangyoon's party had come close enough that I could clearly see his expressions.

As soon as I stopped talking, Kim Sangyoon jumped into the air and landed right in front of me in an instant. Perhaps the more one levels up, the more the body transcends–becoming more like a warrior as the essence of the class lines itself into cells, mutating during mitosis.

"Hey! You're alive?!" Kim Sangyoon held onto my shoulders and shook lightly. His husky voice expressed both disbelief and relief. His reddening face belied his great worry for me after I had separated from the party.

I laughed half-heartedly and mumbled, "I was lucky…" I guess I was slightly touched that Kim Sangyoon, who was a notorious miser and cared only for money, was worried about me.

"These are people that are supposed to carry you through this dungeon? They don't look too strong." The heartwarming atmosphere was soon broken. My expression froze at Seo Dawon's thoughtless and candid evaluation.

'There'd be confrontation even if you just quietly existed, why would you go and make yourself a target like this!' I was afraid that Kim Sangyoon would retaliate with harsh words.

I tried to salvage the situation, "Oh, right! This is….."

However, Kim Sangyoon spoke first. "You're not hurt anywhere?"

"Huh? Yeah….I mean, I was hurt just once…But I healed myself with potions."

"What happened beneath the lake? Ji-hwan said he lost contact with you, so we spent about an hour searching for you, dude."

"Ah, really…? I don't really know either…I passed onto a different location…"

Huh? That’s strange. Didn’t he hear what Seo Dawon said…?

Even if Kim Sangyoon didn’t hear those callous words, he ignored the man standing by my side and talked only to me. The whole situation felt disconnected from reality.

How could anyone not give an obvious stranger a single suspicious glance? The odd behavior was all the more confusing when I considered how sensitive Users usually were, paying close attention to the most trivial details in the Dungeons.

Would paranoid Users truly ignore someone they had never seen before? Stranger still, Seo Dawon was calm, as if he expected the others to ignore him. I looked between the party and my servant, trying to puzzle out this contradiction.

As Kim Sangyoon’s party members caught up to our location and, one by one, surrounded me, the invisible boundary between Seo Dawon and the rest of the Users became quite distinct. Just like Sangyoon, the other party members never acknowledged Seo Dawon nor asked me about his presence. No one acted awkwardly, as if they were purposefully ignoring the revived man.

When I looked at Seo Dawon, who stood a ways away from the group, with a puzzled expression, he gave me an inexplicable smile and pointed beneath his feet. His body did not cast a shadow.

* * *

“You really have killer luck.” The Animist told me. If it weren’t for his water spirit’s oxygen helmet, I would have died after I fell into the lake.

Alongside Kim Sangyoon, all the others were extremely surprised as well. “Hey! How did you survive!?” they asked, harmlessly. I briefly explained all that had happened, only omitting the details of my contract with Seo Dawon.

The tales of my escapade required a dubious suspension of belief and faith in luck or the gods, but no one seemed to confront me with serious doubts. However, after listening to my story, Kim Sangyoon said, “From now on, stick close to me. Alright?” I wasn’t sure if his blunt instructions came from a place of compassion or scolding.

Still touched by Kim Sangyoon’s uncharacteristic show of kindness, I walked quietly behind him without bothering to quibble with his commands.

…..Except, Seo Dawon, who only I could see, suddenly began to make sarcastic remarks towards Kim Sangyoon. “What pretense, does he think he’s strong?”

I tried to signal through my gaze the inability to comfortably answer him now. However, when Seo Dawon’s eyes met mine, he simply drew closer and began to talk earnestly.

“Is he your friend? Ah, but you have none…Did you pay him to carry you?”

Though Seo Dawon seemed to be talking to himself, I felt that it was too unfair to leave his questions unanswered, especially when I felt his penetrating gaze in my periphery. Eventually, after checking to see if anyone was paying attention, I nodded.

Even though by this point Seo Dawon should have understood that I couldn’t easily answer his questions without appearing like a madman, he continued his interrogation. “How much did you pay? A lot?”

I lightly shook my head, to indicate that I couldn’t give him an answer.

‘Let’s talk after we get out!’ My eyes blinked at him, hoping to convey my desperation.

But my second servant wasn’t even half as intuitive to my inner thoughts as my first. Lackey wouldn’t have given me this much trouble. “Are you ignoring me?” he said, voice drawling.

‘You! Just wait till we get out! Have you no tact?!’

Instead of speaking, I discreetly slapped Seo Dawon’s arm. Only then did he seem to realize that I wasn’t willing to respond in order to maintain a composed facade.

Suddenly, the system’s messaging function activated.

A message from your servant, ‘Seo Dawon,’ has arrived. Will you accept the conversation?’

Seo Dawon: Hi [2]

……What on earth?

I clicked my acceptance and stared, puzzled, at the translucent window that transformed into a chatting application.

Seo Dawon laughed, “As expected, you had no idea this existed?” He seemed retroactively amused at my struggles. I was miffed–but what could I say? It was true that I knew little about the system and its functions. Conscious of my surroundings, I held my fingers aloft and slowly began to type.

Choi Leekyung: I had no idea. You're the first person I've ever revived.

"When new functions get added to the system, don't you thoroughly check the updated features?" His disdain was clear in his voice.

I secretly glared at him with a sidelong glance, but he wasn't intimidated. Seo Dawon shrugged his shoulders and nodded at the message window. His imperious expression was the same as when he dared me to speak informally.

Choi Lee-kyung: Wow~ You're so smart^6

I was sarcastic, as I had nothing else to say. However, Seo Dawon didn't seem to mind. In fact, he giggled quietly as he replied [lolololololololol]; my gentle insult didn't seem to have any lasting impact.

Seo Dawon did not end the conversation and instead asked me again, through the messaging app, [How much did you pay to get carried? lolol]

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: That feel when a skeleton is more intuitive than your new servant~ MC can be mega sarcastic if he wants to be lmao.

Footnotes

1. The original slang term is (jjambap). It’s often used in the military, school, or the workplace to indicate a long history of working.
2. Often, in korean, slang involves truncated words or phonetically sounding out letters in english. Here, the original text said , = similar to the ‘h’ sound in english. = a vowel sound–here it means i. Together = Hi, or any informal greeting.

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Chapter 26

Chapter 26

Jeez…Is he the type of person that'll persistently hound for an answer until the bitter end?

Choi Lee-kyung: 2 million.

Seo Dawon: You're kidding?

Choi Lee-kyung: kek

"Seriously?"

What would he say if I told him the amount was twice that?

Once again, I was determined to ignore his questions until we escaped the Dungeon. Seo Dawon simply murmured, "That's cheap," and grew silent.

That's cheap….? Um….. Is that so…..

Choi Lee-kyung: Actually, it was 4 mil~<3 [1]

Seo Dawon showed little response to my honest reveal.

Was that really the only question he had? However, within the minute, a new message arrived. [For that price, though, wouldn’t it be better to get carried through a more useful Dungeon, to get power leveled?]

As expected, he must be bored. But I also found the long, silent walk down the hallway uninteresting, and, at a quick glance, no one seemed to have noticed my strange behavior. So, as if my thighs were a keyboard, I began typing.

Choi Lee-kyung: I needed to strengthen Lackey.

Seo Dawon: Lackey? What’s that?

Choi Lee-kyung: My first servant.

Seo Dawon: First??? You have another servant besides me?

Choi Lee-kyung: Mhmm. You’re the second.

Before I could explain that Lackey was the default servant provided when Necromancers chose their profession, Seo Dawon said, “What…I wasn’t your first?” in a strange tone.

Choi Lee-Kyung: What are you talking about ^^;

Seo Dawon: I’m hurt?

Seo Dawon: TT_TT

Choi Lee-kyung: GG. [2]

I was annoyed–he was obviously making fun of me.

However, Seo Dawon quickly changed the topic. [So, the material needed to strengthen your servant only drops from this Dungeon?]

Choi Lee-kyung: Mhmm. I just needed one ingredient before I could proceed.

Seo Dawon: A boss drop?

Choi Lee-kyung: Nah, from a normal mob… [3]

“You paid 2 million just to reap the rewards from an ordinary monster?”

Choi Lee-kyung: If you aren’t going to say anything useful, then shhh

Seo Dawon: Okie [4]

In this way, the conversation continued.

While we walked for 30 minutes, we continued to exchange banter. Unexpectedly, Seo Dawon was not a bad person to talk to. Though I had the constant feeling that he was amused with my general situation, he didn’t seem overly patronizing–just teasing? His words were surprisingly funny as well; I was in danger of bursting into laughter twice.

Perhaps Seo Dawon was curious about the man who revived him, he had asked countless questions about my life. I was reluctant to answer many of them…Family ties, where I lived before I entered the Hub…

Whether or not I had a girlfriend…quite personal questions. I lied, [I had one, but got dumped]. Though Seo Dawon had a good sense of humor and was easy to talk to, he was not the type to be considerate of social conventions. He didn’t seem to notice my reluctance to answer some of his questions. If something tickled his curiosity, he dug for answers until the bitter end.

In fact, I’ve never had a girlfriend before. Sure, I wasn’t the most popular person around, but I was also uninterested in women in the first place….But I kept that information hidden. I felt if I had revealed my disinterest in women, Seo Dawon would just dig more into my personal business.

Seo Dawon: Why were you dumped lololol

Choi Lee-kyung: Because I started living in the Hubs.

Choi Lee-kyung: We couldn’t meet often.

Seo Dawon: (*whistle noise*) She wasn’t a User?

Choi Lee-kyung: Mhmm. We got together before I became a User. When I came here, she left me.

At this point, I slowly became curious about Seo Dawon’s past.

Now that I think about it, this jerk dug so far into my past without revealing anything about himself! I didn’t ask before since I didn’t want to make him wistful or uncomfortable about his death…but it seems I was considerate for nothing! He just casually asked me whatever suited his fancy, without avoiding any topic.

Seo Dawon’s personality didn’t seem to be one to be stuck on the past….So, during a pause in our conversation, I lobbed a question at him instead.

Choi Lee-kyung: And you?

Seo Dawon: ?

Choi Lee-kyung: Did you have a girlfriend?

Seo Dawon: keke

Seo Dawon: Look at my face.

Seo Dawon: Do you really think they would have left me alone?

Choi Lee-kyung: lol

The answer was hard to refute; I turned my head, unwilling to compare myself to Dawon. Instead the ghostly man just met my eyes and smiled. He looked me up and down before saying, in a meaningful tone, “I was popular with men too.”

Choi Lee-kyung: I doubt that, heh.

My sarcastic retorts did their best to hide my flushed cheeks and agitation, but I couldn’t help but think that my thoughts were somehow transparent–that made it hard to speak to Dawon afterwards.

Seo Dawon didn’t make efforts to continue heckling at me either, and–thankfully–the conversation soon dissipated.

Kim Sangyoon shouted “Halt!” His large voice drew all attention. The heavy set warrior lowered his greatsword onto the floor with a metallic thud and looked at me. “Choi Lee-kyung. What’s the name of the material you need?”

“Ah, that’s….’Contaminated Dark Liquid.’ It drops when you kill a Mourning Slime….”

“And those appear in the trap rooms, correct?”

His latter question was not directed at me but at the Treasure Hunter leading the party. He replied, “Yes, hyung! We’re entering the room right now!”

A new system message popped up simultaneously with his response.

≳————- ❋ ————-≲

You’ve entered a Normal Mode trap room!

≳————- ❋ ————-≲

After that message popped up, a transparent yellow liquid flowed out of the cracks in the walls, blocking the passageway.

Though the new monster provoked my sense of danger, I wasn’t nervous at all. Nothing could compare to the horrifying beings I’d encountered in the hard route or in Dawon’s foggy memories…However, the liquid’s stench was a problem.

Though we were 100 meters away, the sour, damp, and nasty smell still poked at our nostrils. As the smell stagnated and concentrated, I felt like vomiting.

≳————- ❋ ————-≲

New monster information has been updated!

[Tower of Command – Mourning Slime.]

The Mourning Slime is an acid monster that only appears in the normal route's trap room. This slime, which used to live in the underground waterways of the tower, usually gorges itself upon the dead bodies clogging the sewers. Upon realizing how delicious living beings are, the slime has left its territory to directly hunt for prey!

It has strong acid and poison attacks and is resistant to physical skills; please be careful!

≳————- ⁕ —————-≲

After reading the message, all the party members took out and wore the masks that they had prepared in advance. Kim Sangyoon, in the lead, had also followed along, but he hesitated when he noticed my uncovered nose.

"Hey, you don't have a mask?" He asked.

"Huh? Yeah…."

I was at a loss–this situation was so far out of my wheelhouse. I didn't know that the Mourning Slime's stench would taint the air.

Kim Sangyoon looked at me in surprise and cursed, "Are you out of your mind?" Indeed, I felt like I would go crazy if I took my nose out of the crook of my elbow. He threw something, a small black cloth, through the gap between my arm and face. "Quickly use that, you fool."

[Refresh Air – Mask]

Type: Mask
Durability: 140/140
Level Restriction: N/A

Special Skill: Increased resistance to odors and poisonous vapors while worn.

Description:
Made by Ha Jieun of ‘Jeolla Workshop.’
Odor Resistance +100
Poisonous Vapor Resistance +100

Berserker had unexpectedly given me a new mask, fresh from his inventory; I was so startled by his thoughtfulness, that I stared at the cloth, dumbfounded.

Then, he approached my side, “Why aren’t you putting it on?” He clapped my back with a heavy thud. I quickly scrambled to protect my face from the devastating odor.

Why is he being so nice all of a sudden…?

“Hey, stay back, okay?! Even if the material spawns, don’t approach until I give you the ‘all clear!'” Sangyoon shouted. “If you get poisoned, you’ll die a dog’s death.”

“…Ah! Yes!”

Following his instructions, I ran to the very back of the party. The rest of the members began to fall into formation and deal with the slow but tricky looking ‘Mourning Slime.’

At first, the slime didn’t look like a monster and resembled, instead, yellow and oily wastewater that leaked into a river. But, as it attacked another party member, its mouth became well defined. Frankly, the image of it gaping its maw and trying to swallow a human was shocking.

“That’s going to drop the material you need?” Seo Dawon, who had been standing quietly, suddenly spoke.

“Yeah…” I said, in a quiet voice, staring resolutely ahead.

TL: MC is so done, ya'll.
Question for the translation: do you guys understand many of the gaming terms? (like power levelling) or would you like me to add in footnotes for those as well (like I do for the slang).

Footnotes

1. So, our MC is using 'aegyo-speak' here, which is an intentionally cutesy way of speaking. This is, of course, more sarcasm to make fun of ML.
2. The originally actually says Sugo or "good work" . But it's being used sarcastically in this slang. Aka, it's what you say after you play games on a MOBA to someone. It can actually mean "good job" or it can also mean "get good noob."
3. Nah = . To be correct, the most literal translation of this is ' n n.' It's the slang way of typing no-no.
4. Originally the text says — Slang term for okay. Once again, Korean truncates words to the first letters of its syllables, furthermore, Seo Dawon is acting cute here.

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Chapter 27

Chapter 27

Once again, Kim Sangyoon’s party members all gathered around their Bard to counter the Mourning Slime.

The Bard began to play the flute; a graceful melody flowed out. A shiny ring formed over the heads of the party members standing near. That ring effect was so famous that even I knew what it was–one of the Bard’s most difficult buffs, [Sacrificial Blessing], had been applied.

The skill was quite effective: preventing the enemy’s physical attacks up to 120% of the User’s own stats while keeping the User’s stamina from being consumed.

The skill, befitting its beneficial effects, was particularly tricky to perform and had a long cooldown. Many parties saved this buff for an emergency, but Kim Sangyoon’s party used it not 10 minutes after the Mourning Slime was engaged.

They had little choice–the slimes began to occupy all sides of the hallway and spat acid at the party.

At first, I thought it weird for Sangyoon’s party to use this powerful blessing so early. Soon enough, however, I saw the acid saliva bounce off the protection buff and ricochet onto the walls, creating white smoke and leaving behind pockmarks in the stone. The hairs on the back of my neck began to raise in fear.

Furthermore, since Necromancers received no benefits from holy-attribute buffs, I retreated even farther away, afraid that errant acid slime would hit my unprotected self. If Seo Dawon had not blocked my way, I'm sure I would have jumped to quickly escape.

"The Mourning Slime has no eyes and, instead, tracks its prey through the vibrations caused by movement," Seo Dawon said as he threw a fist-sized stone near the slime. As the stone touched the ground, the slime enveloped the rolling rock in an instant. The stone melted from the slime's poisons; when it disappeared, the slime continued to pace around the area, searching for more.

"So when dealing with a group of slimes, you need one damage dealer to draw their attention as bait. It's good to establish the direction….." Seo Dawon paused in his explanation while watching Kim Sangyoon's party deal with the enemy.

I naturally followed his gaze, and, unlike Seo Dawon's clear explanation, Kim Sangyoon's party was all clumped in the same location.

At the scene, Seo Dawon laughed openly, "As expected of their rank, they cling together."

Though his attitude was a bit despicable, even I could see that Kim Sangyoon's party had no strategy; the fight was more akin to a street brawl. [1] . Though the party currently had the advantage due to Sangyoon's outstanding individual ability, victory would not have been guaranteed if there were just a few more Mourning Slimes.

Seo Dawon didn't stop commenting, focusing, this time, on the Animist who had called his water spirit, Undine, to fight the slimes. "Is he using a water spirit to deal with slimes…? Fundamentally, they should know to attack with fire spirits like Salamander…"

He didn't hide his disdain for the Treasure Hunter either. The Treasure Hunter had been attacking the slimes with a crossbow but had missed all his shots. Instead, his opponent stunned him in one blow.

“It should be common sense that plain physical attacks, without skill empowerment, wouldn’t work…What are they doing?”

“…….”

Why, as I listened to Seo Dawon’s words, did I also feel embarrassed? I was only there to get carried?!

“This party must have gotten to this point by trusting that red-haired User,” Seo Dawon finished. The red haired User, Kim Sangyoon, was certainly showing the most noticeably effective performance within this party. He stood at the forefront, wielding his greatsword [Berserker].

“Chest Slash!” Kim Sangyoon held his sword high above his head and struck across, triggering the skill attached to his blade.

The huge slime in front of him was hit directly by the red skill that flew out from the end of the blade. It split into two pieces, dying with a chilling scream, [kyaakk!] One blow dealt enough damage to kill it instantly.

“I’m jealous….” I muttered casually.

“Of what?” Seo Dawon asked.

“I wish I had that kind of item…”

“Are you serious?”

“….”

Seo Dawon looked at me, his expression questioning whether I could truly be content with such an item.

Honestly, I understood his confusion. Before he died, Seo Dawon was a guildmaster of the best Guild in Korea. He had never failed a raid, except for the <Tower of Command>, so he must not have lacked financially. For such a person, an item like ‘Berserker’ would not have registered as something desirable… [2]

Perhaps Seo Dawon temporarily forgot about his circumstances, his death. All of his plentiful bank accounts would have disappeared.

And I, his contract partner, still had many student loans left to pay. I earned less than a million won per month while dungeoneering, and I struggled to accept help from back home. Therefore, Seo Dawon was also penniless now.

However, as if he had not realized his current financial situation, Seo Dawon gave me a head to toe glance and said, “When we leave, let’s pick out a combat uniform first. Before we can find a suitable item from a Dungeon, we can buy something basic, ready-to-wear, from DAA.”

“DAA? Are you talking about the workshop, DAA?”

“Yeah. That still exists, right?”

That’s not the problem…That workshop’s brand was the most famous of those that processed fabric and leather.

In terms of design, the workshop collaborated with famous contemporary fashion designers. Streamers unboxed their products live on broadcast as a way to flex. In particular, the uniform that Seo Dawon had mentioned costs 100 million won per part–the brand justified the price by highlighting the raw material: 100% dragon leather.

Is he expecting me to buy that sort of luxury right now?

“I’ll wear it if you buy it,” I said sarcastically, hoping to convey the absurdity of his statement.

However, Seo Dawon casually continued as if he perceived nothing wrong, “Also, buy yourself some accessories. You look broke right now.”

I told him again, “Hey, I don’t have any money.” Seo Dawon just looked at me as if I spouted gibberish.

“What you’re saying is impossible with my bank balance….”

“Hey! Choi Lee-kyung! The material you want appeared!”

Before I could further explain my financial situation, Kim Sangyoon called out to me in a loud voice and cut me off. In the end, our conversation was halted in lieu of more pressing matters.

Kim Sangyoon placed his sweaty arms around my shoulders as he escorted me to the ingredient I needed and said, out of nowhere, “Hey, write a good review for us, okay? I’ll believe in you!” He gave a seemingly friendly smile and continued, “I even gave you a mask right?….Anyways, it all ended well.” His heavy hands patted me on the shoulder.

I was flustered at his words; what was he talking about? I asked, “A review…?”

“Don’t you know? It’s common etiquette to leave a review on ‘User Alert’ after getting carried by a party.”

“Ah…..”

“Write well, okay?”

“Ah…yeah.”

“And maybe…You could also post a good review on places like Ranking Gods. All right?”

“…..Yes.”

While nodding meekly, I recalled similar posts on the Ranking Gods community. Similarly, there were many comments that urged users to report carry-related disputes to the ‘User Alert’ app.

I mentally revisited all our past interactions in <The Tower of Command>. Perhaps the threat of a bad review had greater impact than I thought; Kim Sangyoon eagerly pushed for a nice write up.

My heart felt a bit bitter–his friendliness and his thoughtfulness with the mask was not truly sincere….but, whatever his motive, I had gotten what I

desperately needed thanks to his assistance. He and his party had saved me in multiple meanings of the word.

“I’ll write good things,” I reassured him.

≳————————- ❈ —————————-≲

‘Normal Mode’ boss monster Lich Lord (Normal) has been killed by ‘Ahn Juseong’ and 63 others!

‘Hard Mode’ boss monster Lich Lord (Hard) has been killed by ‘Bae Jaemin’ and 33 others (all from a single party)!

≳————————- ❈ —————————-≲

My answer and the system alert blended into each other. The notification informed us that another party had defeated the boss.

As we haven’t even made it to the boss’s door yet, our raid ended in vain. The other members also looked slightly embarrassed and dejected at the unexpected alarm.

In particular, Kim Sangyoon’s expression was frightfully distorted.

“….Ahn Juseong? Ahn Juseong, that bastard, was supposed to inform me before he defeated the boss!”

Huh? What’s this?

He’s not disappointed at the boss being stolen away…but he’s angry at something else? Did something go wrong?

Kim Sangyoon suddenly raised his finger in the air and moved it violently. Though his body hid his precise actions, somehow I thought I saw a message interface–not unlike the exchanges shared between Seo Dawon and I. Kim Sangyoon seemed to be speaking to Ahn Juseong, the User who defeated the normal mode boss.

However, as soon as he confirmed the raid's completion, the Bard walked up to Kim Sangyoon tactlessly. "I think it's over…Why don't we get out of here, for now?"

Ah, the bard must be a hired mercenary. As his job was finished, he didn't seem to want to wait and waste time as Kim Sangyoon worked through his anger.

No one could find fault with his polite tone and courteous expression. Eventually, Kim Sangyoon gritted his teeth and told us, "Let's leave."

A small, "Go to Hub," message appeared, and my surroundings distorted.

"We're finally getting out of this place." Seo Dawon murmured.

I closed my eyes.

TL: Thanks for reading, despite the sedated update schedule~ Exams period is T_T

Footnotes

1. The original said something similar to a school gang fight, but street brawl flows better in English. The connotation of chaos and amateur fighting is similar.
2. Originally, the phrase used here is ‘come to the eye.’ Aka, their eyes wouldn’t even look at it.

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Chapter 28

Chapter 28

After leaving the <Tower of Command>, I greeted Kim Sangyoon and his party and moved to the nearby warehouse to pick up my confiscated cell phone.

To be honest, I was a little hesitant to approach Kim Sangyoon as he maintained a fierce expression on his face. But, after one of the party members kindly said, “Oh, good work today,” I was able to finish my greetings and escape conversational courtesy without much awkwardness.

As I left the entrance area, an alarming number of cameras, reporters, and media outlets were swarming the immediate surroundings. Judging from the jubilant atmosphere, it seems that rumors of the successful raid had spread far and wide.

“Your name?” said a warehouse worker.

“Choi Lee-kyung.”

“What model?”

“A Galaxy…”

After I recovered my cell phone and turned it on, I received several alerts from various portal sites. Articles detailing Bae Jaemin’s success over the hard mode scenario occupied all of the headlines.

I stared at Bae Jaemin's photo on the screen. Out of the corner of my eyes, I saw Seo Dawon's steady gaze, so I turned the phone off. However, when I looked at him directly, Seo Dawon was not staring at me but at some indeterminate point on the ground…as if he was deep in thought.

I called to him, carefully, "Seo Dawon."

"Huh?"

"If you don't mind, I want to go home and rest…Is there anything you need to do?"

"No, let's go."

After seeing his quickening pace, I impulsively asked, "Bae Jaemin is going to have a press conference…Do you want to see it?"

"It's fine." He said, with an obvious tone. Then, hesitantly, "Besides, I got to see his face up front and close earlier, didn't I?"

"When? Ah…."

He was probably referring to the encounter right after our contract was finalized.

Come to think of it, Seo Dawon must have shielded my body and presence at that time…What was he thinking when he saw the guild's traitor? I opened my mouth to ask, but closed it subtly when I noticed three random Users passing by.

After they were far enough for our conversation to go unheard, I asked with a low voice, "About your revenge…What are you going to do about it in the future? I have no clue how to proceed, honestly."

"First, I need to know what Bae Jaemin was offered for his betrayal. Only then can we begin planning in earnest."

"Ah…."

Seo Dawon answered my questions as if he was mumbling to himself, tapping his cheeks with his fingertips. He seemed to be organizing his thoughts, so I opted to organize my own without disturbing him.

Since I've signed the contract…Bae Jaemin…I'm expected to kill him, right? And, recalling Seo Dawon's memories, Bae Jaemin isn't the only target for revenge. There were at least four other key figures: Lim Jisoo, Red Dragon guild master Koo Kyungman, Opera deputy guild master Ryu Hyerin.

Right now I was curious about the scope of Dawon's perfect revenge. How many must I kill before he's satisfied? In addition, no one could easily disdain the status and power of all the targets..

"You keep sighing," Seo Dawon remarked.

Still lost in thought, I evasively murmured "Ah, I'm just…" Not only did I have nothing particularly salient to add to the conversation, but I also had no desire to offend my partner with careless errant words.

However, Seo Dawon looked at my expression and wrung his hands. "I'm not scolding you…Why do you look more depressed than me–the literal dead corpse?" he asked.

"…I'm just tired. Enough about me; are you okay?"

Seo Dawon must have a strong and stable mentality. Even as a vengeful ghost he expended the effort to talk in a friendly manner, as if everything was normal. If I were in his situation, I wondered if I could wholly retain my rationality and banter with others.

"Why? Do I look too jovial for a dead man?"

"That's…I didn't mean anything bad with my question."

"It's true. I'm in a good mood."

"….Really?"

“It’s been a while since I came to the Hub. It’s gotten a lot better since I went into the <Tower of Command>. The air is refreshing.” He even closed his eyes and breathed deeply, as if he were basking in the natural mountain air.

I didn’t want to sour the mood, so I simply said, “That’s a relief.”

Seo Dawon, however, continued with a smile on his face. “Once you hit rock bottom, the only way to go is up. My spirit is still reveling in the victory of revival. Match my beat.”

“….Yeah.” I bowed my head; I had no idea what expression I should make at this moment.

“As a matter of fact, I still can’t believe I’m dead. Honestly, I don’t think I’ve fully accepted my death yet.”

“…..”

“Besides, thinking about these matters for too long will only result in a headache.” His words implied that comfort was not necessary–that he would reject my sympathy. Afterwards, we crossed the city streets awkwardly; any meaningful conversation had ceased.

As I led the way through familiar alleys and storefronts, I saw the blue front gate of my lodgings. I hesitated before pointing at the door.

“Here it is….”

“Do you live alone?”

“Yeah.” I sidestepped Seo Dawon, who was gawking at the surroundings, and entered through the door.

As Seo Dawon looked curiously at the small yard and porch, I realized that this was the first time someone had visited my home since I became a User. Though, perhaps vengeful ghosts would not count as an ordinary guest…(Lol, you think?)

I flinched for a moment when I saw him follow me into the house while wearing shoes.

Since Seo Dawon was just maintaining the image of his form right before death, his clothing was merely an illusion. However, the vivid nature of the ghost made it hard to distinguish reality from falsehood; I couldn't help but be repulsed by the breach in social norms.

While I stood, faltering, Seo Dawon began to look around the living room in earnest, like a familiar guest. My mouth froze; I didn't know how to talk to him. Gracelessly, I plodded to the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, and poured myself a glass of water. I realized I was quite thirsty after emptying that full glass.

"Can I turn on the TV?"

"Huh? Yeah!"

However, unlike me who was dying of awkwardness, Seo Dawon perched on a small sofa and comfortably asked to use the TV; he was already holding the remote control. After nodding, I also watched the TV screen from the kitchen table. I wasn't comfortable leaving him alone in the living room just yet.

Bae Jaemin's face filled the screen. Judging by the red 'Live' banner at the top of the screen, Bae Jaemin seemed to be conducting a live interview in the media zone we had passed earlier. [1] I involuntarily flinched at his face; in contrast, Seo Dawon–largely unperturbed–simply put aside the remote control.

–Please briefly tell us about your current state of mind.

–….Actually, I feel a bit complicated right now. However, if I have to pinpoint something, I think it's relief.

“Oh?” Despite Bae Jaemin’s appearance, Seo Dawon was watching the interview comfortably, leaning his back against the back of the sofa. Suddenly, he leaned forward and began to focus after Bae Jaemin fixed his microphone and began to talk. Something seemed to catch his eye.

“…….What is it?”

“Wait a minute.” He was on the verge of piercing the screen with his focused gaze. Then, he began to flip through various channels, observing Bae Jaemin through various camera angles.

Seo Dawon stopped at a channel that showed his whole upper body–not just a close up of the face; his forehead scrunched at what he had found.

Meanwhile, the interview kept on progressing despite Dawon’s machinations. I couldn’t hear the questions properly because the sound kept cutting as the channels changed, but Bae Jaemin looked to be answering the interviewer sincerely while maintaining a humble attitude.

–Thank you very much. However, I could not have finished the raid today without the much needed assistance from the rest of my teammates. If you don’t mind, I’d like to introduce the team members; since long before, they’ve suffered so much to help me.

I carefully looked at each of the faces introduced on TV, one by one, wondering if these new ‘teammates’ were the reason for the forehead creases currently on Seo Dawon’s face.

As if this segment was prepared in advance, subtitles containing their names and occupations accompanied each photo. After introducing the last team member, the camera once again zoomed in closely on Bae Jaemin’s face.

When the camera light shined upon him again, Bae Jaemin seemed speechless unlike his previous relaxed attitude. Everyone on the premises fell quiet; he bowed his head in purpose of some indeterminate behavior.

Long and delicate fingers dabbed at his eyes, as if he were wiping away unseen tears. He then spoke in an overtly hoarse voice, as if his throat was parched.

–Now, I think I can speak about future plans….From now on, I plan to create a new guild with them and continue regular activity.

His acting was so outstanding–he must have been preparing for this situation for quite a long time.

Naturally, the audience would recall his tragic story while listening to his hoarse voice and seeing his grim expression. In addition, the news was delivered after clearing what was once an impregnable dungeon, the <Tower of Command>, after a three-year ban. I wondered when he began planning this performance.

–Since long ago, I've received many favorable offers from other guilds… But the Red Lotus guild has always been stagnating in my heart. It's become sort of a trauma. If I, the sole survivor of the guild, decide to dedicate my services to another, then Red Lotus would truly disappear. It felt like I was betraying them….

"Ha….." I sighed.

Seo Dawon did not comment, but I, who knew the depths of Bae Jaemin's sins towards the Red Lotus, was flabbergasted at his bold-faced lies.

His performance was not finished.

–Thus, this raid on the <Tower of Command> was very important to me. The team members here….they understood my deep obsession and supported me both mentally and materially. They gave me a new goal in life where before I couldn’t imagine such hope beyond finishing this dungeon.

–Then, what will be the name of the new guild?

The convenient flow of the reporter’s question convinced me that this interview was scripted.

Bae Jaemin raised his clear eyes, black and white, to the camera lens.

–It’s River and Sea ( ). I look forward to working with you all in the future. [2]

With that, Bae Jaemin bowed his head deeply.

The [River and Sea] guild members behind him also gave their own polite greetings. The camera focused on Jaemin’s movements, capturing all of his careful poise, as he turned and walked away.

A small round of applause awaited the new members of the ‘Sea and Rivers’; reporters flocked like vultures…Above all, Bae Jaemin heartily smiled on camera for the first time–his countenance happy and relaxed.

Click–

If Seo Dawon hadn’t turned off the TV, I would have run to turn it off myself. I couldn’t bear to see such a deceptive scene. I, who had no talent

for comfort, couldn’t force myself to look at Seo Dawon’s face and remained silent in front of the empty screen.

TL: I’ve been turbo TL-ing bc I’m procrastinating. Also, if anyone wants to see some of the fanart flying around for this novel, give me an @ in the discord! (Or I guess I could see about adding some in the TL section if people are interested)

Footnotes

1. In the original, the TV banner was written in English, ‘Live.’ Whereas the ‘live’ before the interview was written in Korean.
2. Alright, this one’s really hard to translate. Literally, it’s the hanja for River and Sea. I could also leave it as it is phonetically: HaHae. It’s also idiomatic for something wide and vast–unlimited. However, that’s really awkward as a guild name. I’m still workshopping this, so any opinion is also appreciated.

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Chapter 29

Chapter 29

“I think I know why Bae Jaemin betrayed us.” Seo Dawon strode out of the living room to the kitchen and sat at the dining table. His tone was a bit strange. Glancing at his complicated expression, I pulled out the chair across his.

“…What was the reason?”

“He was never a part of the Red Lotus in the first place. He must have been a spy implanted by the [Sea and River] guild.”

“They existed back then?”

“Yeah. Their guildmaster tried to recruit me long ago.”

Though it was the first time I’ve ever heard of this guild, listening to Seo Dawon, I noticed this suspicious connection. “No way… Did they send Bae Jaemin because you wouldn’t join the guild?”

“Well…that could be one explanation. Or, perhaps, I’ve bothered them in some other way after establishing the Red Lotus guild. Either way, after refusing to join the guild, I forgot about their existence. To my knowledge, we’ve never crossed paths afterwards….I have a hunch that this guild is connected to my death in some way. Actually, after seeing Bae Jaemin’s act, I’m certain.”

The original targets of revenge were already so formidable, there was no clear answer to the path we must take to deal with them. However, when Seo Dawon said that there was another organization behind the black curtain [1] supporting Bae Jaemin, the situation felt hopeless.

I wrung my nervous hands and asked, “Who’s their guildmaster?”

“I don’t know. When they offered to recruit me, the guild master sent a representative to hide their identity. They also demanded the condition that I would remain silent about the guild’s name or their activities.”

“That’s very suspicious.”

“Yeah. That’s why I refused.”

–Ding!

Suddenly, my cell phone alarm rang.

In an attempt to turn it off, I unlocked my phone; previews for news pertaining to the <Tower of Command> and Bae Jaemin filled the screen. I forgot that in my bid to prepare for the raid, I set my phone to gather and filter for important keywords.

“…Sorry, I’ll turn this off,” I said.

“That’s okay. But, since I have something I’d like to search, can I borrow it for a second?”

I willingly handed Seo Dawon my cell phone. He opened a search portal website and began searching for images with the keyword, ‘Bae Jaemin.’

[Sniping the hearts of women….Which User looks best in a suit?

He searched around until he landed upon a picture where Bae Jaemin waved his hands at the camera and carefully began to scrutinize the photo.

I wondered why Seo Dawon would bother to observe Bae Jaemin wearing a suit so closely, but noticed, a moment later, that he was zooming onto his wrist. The enlarged region revealed an accessory–a bracelet?–peeking out of the edge of his sleeves.

“Ah, Isn’t that [Beatrice’s Prayer?]” I asked, thoughtlessly identifying the famous item on his wrist.

Seo Dawon considered my words and asked, “Do you know where he got it?”

“No, that’s something I don’t know…But I’ve seen it often on broadcasts.”

When Seo Dawon heard my answer, he muttered to himself, “As expected, I guess Bae Jaemin did kill Garam-ie.” [2]

I wondered who Garam-ie was….Searching through my memories, I recalled the Treasure Hunter who accompanied Bae Jaemin to find possible hints or solutions to the Tower’s final Boss, the Lich Lord.

“Don’t tell me….did that bracelet originally belong to that Garam person?”

“That’s right.”

[Beatrice’s Prayer] became famous through its unusual inheritance mechanics. Until its former owner dies, the item will not recognize a new owner. If Seo Dawon’s words were true, then Bae Jaemin most likely stole Garam’s item under these opportunistic circumstances.

How could Bae Jaemin kill the item’s owner and wear it around so proudly and nonchalantly. I saw his smile displayed prominently in the article. Honestly, first impressions can’t be trusted anymore; no one would believe him to be capable of such heinous acts.

“I’m speechless…then, maybe, did he betray Garam for that item? After all, it’s quite rare…” There have been terrible instances with Users that have gone crazy over certain items.

However, Seo Dawon lightly shook his head. “Well, it’s a good item, but it’s not really necessary for Priests. [Beatrice’s Prayer]’s primary function is more of a defense mechanism to assist melee strikers with extremely low defenses. Priests, who can heal on their own, wouldn’t find it so useful.”

That means the guy stole an item he truly did not need…The more Seo Dawon spoke, the more my questions multiplied. “Even then, he’d take it and wear it?” I asked.

“Perhaps he’s using it like a trophy.”

A trophy to commemorate killing all of the members of the Red Lotus guild?

That’s just too much…

I had wanted to ask Seo Dawon if there was any other grudge that Bae Jaemin held against them, but I couldn’t bear to vocalize my question and instead swallowed my words.

However, the other preemptively supplied the answers to my unasked questions, “Jung Garam and Bae Jaemin had a bit of a bad relationship. Though they’re the same age, Jung Garam was such a genius that the two were often compared. And…how do I say this…Bae Jaemin had such a straight and narrow personality. He greatly valued courtesy, but Garam lived as he wished and had a rough speech pattern.” [3]

“Ah…..”

“Because of Bae Jaemin’s straight-laced personality, Garam often had to censor his words. Though the two never physically fought, they often verbally lashed out at each other. We could all tell that neither vibed with the other….I don’t know about Jung Garam, but Bae Jaemin must have harbored some darkness in his heart over their conflicts. Maybe that’s why he took Beatrice. More than anything, that bracelet must fill him with a sense of victory over his old rival….”

Seo Dawon spoke as if he were wandering someplace in the past. As I listened, I wondered about the snapshots of the Red Lotus’s past–their daily minutia.

So, I asked cautiously, “Was Bae Jaemin pretending to be nice?”

“He was more prudish than nice. He wouldn’t say what he disliked about others and considered manners as the most important aspect of interaction. Even during the Red Lotus’s heyday, I heard the description ‘Seonbi’ (Classical Scholar) being thrown about.” [4]

Wow….So then all of that, too, was just a performance? That’s creepy.

“Just when did he begin to plan his revenge? His true face seems almost like a split personality.”

“I wouldn’t call it a split personality. It’s more like that’s just another aspect of himself. He never did anything that would draw the hatred of others. Even when there was conflict, he would never be the first to throw stones.”

“He…conducted himself well?”

“I’d say so.”

Bae Jaemin had a spotless media image. He was a renowned ranker–a household name–but he was always polite and well spoken, both in public and supposedly in private as well. Perhaps due to his backstory with the Red Lotus guild, he received a lot of sympathy and favor from the public.

Thus, I was shocked when I saw Bae Jaemin in Seo Dawon’s memories and within the Tower’s cave. His threatening face was so impactful; goosebumps were still raised on my arms…I had not personally known the man and still felt betrayed. How must Seo Dawon, who had known him for so long, feel…?

“But, now that I think about it, maybe he turned out that way from having to put up with all the other kids’ personalities and bullshit….” Seo Dawon murmured.

“The other kids?”

“The Red Lotus guild members. Their personalities were…well… should I say that they weren’t normal or particularly sociable….?” Seo

Dawon spoke vaguely. He began to talk about the guild members as if he were cursing them out.

“In the first place, I founded Red Lotus to provide a space for those who were excommunicated from other guilds and had nowhere to go.”

“Really?”

“Ah, don’t get me wrong. I wasn’t excommunicated. I used to be in a guild called [Striker], but the guildmaster’s girlfriend developed feelings for me. So I had no choice but to…..”

“….?”

….Was that a joke?

However, Seo Dawon did not stop to correct himself and continued to briefly explain the origins of his guild. “Besides myself, everyone else left their guilds through some sort of large conflict. They had no other place to go. Do you remember Kim Olim? She was the one with a shield.”

“Ah, Ahh… Yep. Long, black hair…”

“Yeah. That person had a strange jinx. Strangely, every guild she entered ended up in ruins. And, before she came to our guild, she was caught up in all sorts of situations. Like going to prison for beating up her previous guildmaster.”

“Huh? What?” I immediately questioned Seo Dawon’s slander, recalling the benevolent-looking girl from his memories. Sure, she held a shield…but she was average in size….She didn’t seem like someone who would so horrifically beat another?

Seo Dawon suddenly stopped in the middle of his story and looked agitated. “Now that I think about it…Damn. Red Lotus was also eventually screwed?”

“?”

“Were we ruined because of Kim Olim?” he grumbled.

I almost burst into laughter but suppressed it by biting my lower lip and looking elsewhere. He had such a serious face while joking. Fortunately, before I could helplessly devolve into giggles, Seo Dawon returned to his stories about the Red Lotus guild.

“Anyways, I bought out Kim Olim’s prison sentence contract, and I, Kim Olim, and Woo Ragi–the three of us–founded the Red Lotus guild.”

“I-I see…By the way, Woo Ragi? He has a unique name.”

“His personality is even more unique.”

Seo Dawon shook his head, as if he had a phantom pain in his neck. Come to think of it, Seo Dawon seemed to speak disparagingly of Ragi’s personality in his memories.

“He looked so lovely though.”

I had no direct experience with his personality, but Woo Ragi, from Seo Dawon’s perspective, left a deep impression on me.

His weapon couldn’t be called a simple sword; rather, it felt like a sword-shaped jewel, flashy and sparkling. When he used his skills, the transparent blades that had previously floated and shot at the enemy were really beautiful.

When his crystal-like echo blades unfolded and all the individual blades moved in tandem, it looked like the wings of a gliding bird of prey. Furthermore, white face that briefly turned into view while controlling the blades matched the beautiful weapon so well…

However, as soon as he heard my casual words, Seo Dawon squinted his eyes at me, as if he were staring at a bizarre pervert. His eyes questioned my taste.

“Ah! I didn’t mean it in a weird way…”

“Is Ragi your ideal type?”

“T-that’s not what I meant! Ideal type, what on earth….”

Seo Dawon didn’t seem to hear my vehement denials. “You wouldn’t be able to say those things if you knew why Ragi was fired from his previous guild,” he said, meaningfully.

I knew Seo Dawon was trying to tease me, but I couldn’t help but engage and ask, “Why was he fired?”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Official merch card~ (MC is often drawn as/referred to as a hamster)

Footnotes

1. A metaphor for a shadow group/organization. Aka a puppet master
2. ie at the end of a name is a term of endearment–used often among intimate people, friends, family etc
3. The reason why their ages mattered was because those of similar ages were expected to get along. They could be ‘true’ friends, devoid of age hierarchy.
4. A seonbi were virtuous scholars in Korea’s history. They chose to give up wealth and power to serve. the public without a governmental position. (Often, governmental ministers were also considered scholars). They were expected to fulfill confucian values and become a model for morality. Today, the word ‘Seonbi’ describes someone that is well mannered yet gloomy. Someone that hangs onto their values too firmly.

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Chapter 30

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Seo Dawon, however, annoyingly refused to tell me. “You’ll know why when you meet him.”

I responded, mockingly, “Friends often resemble each other.”

He cleanly cut that line of thought short. “Who said we’re friends.”

It was like he was insisting that they were enemies when in reality their relationship was close; I chose to ignore his words.

“Anyway, you’ll sympathize with me when you summon Ragi,” Seo Dawon said.

Listening to his musings, I wondered who I should summon next. Of course, the best situation would be to revive them all at once, but, judging by Seo Dawon’s revival, the summoning process may require for me to reach a certain level or standard.

I asked, “Who do you think I should call first?”

Seo Dawon hesitated, unable to answer. But, soon afterwards, his reply overturned my expectations. “Jung Garam. Garam-ie is perfect for you right now.”

Jung Garam…the original owner of [Beatrice’s Prayer]? The treasure hunter?

I thought it was surprising that Jung Garam's name would be offered first; I had thought he would recommend that I revive either Woo Ragi or Kim Olim.

Seo Dawon, Woo Ragi, and Kim Olim looked especially close, especially compared to the other guild members. Additionally, his two close friends both were close-range physical fighters; their classes would balance well with ours: long-rage spell casters.

"I thought you would ask me to resurrect either Ragi-ssi or Olim-ssi." [1]

"There's a reason why Jung Garam should be summoned first."

When I still looked confused, Seo Dawon gave me a piercing stare. His gaze was quite familiar–I had seen many times in various Dungeons. Those eyes seemed to search my soul, as if it were searching for any use or talent and finding it lacking. I panicked, wondering if I had missed something vital.

"I said that Jung Garam was a genius right?" Seo Dawon said.

"Huh? Uh, yeah…"

"Bae Jaemin wasn't jealous of him for no reason…Garam entered the top rankings 6 months after becoming a User."

"What? No way!" The feat seemed so impossible that I, without realizing, brought my fist down onto the table with a loud thud!

It's already been a year since I became a Necromancer. All I did during that year was earn the ire of others around me and scrimp a living with allowances from home….He became a ranker after half a year? Is that even possible?? From others' anecdotes, even the most ambitious needed at least a year to enter the top 500 rankings…Even then, these ranker hopefuls needed to dive into Dungeons 24 hours a day.

Of course, he accomplished this feat 3 years ago–there's a gap between the competence of the ranking scene then and now. But, even taking into

account the growing pains of early Users, half a year was still a phenomenally short timeline.

I asked Seo Dawon incredulously, “How was that even possible?”

“I’m not sure exactly how he did it. However, I could tell, while raiding with Jung Garam, that he was different from the other Treasure Hunters. He had extraordinary chasing and hunting senses–I ended every raid twice as fast after he joined the party.”

“Then….”

“First, we’ll summon Jung Garam and power level. [2] That way, we can summon the other members quickly. Otherwise, you could spend your whole life summoning the guild members and just die of old age. I want to end this revenge as soon as possible; three years have already been wasted.”

He spoke sensibly.

I had neither the know-how nor the money to level quickly, and Seo Dawon could not afford to waste time. In three years, a power gap would have formed between Seo Dawon and Bae Jaemin. If the traitor was allowed the time to grow stronger, it may take decades just to attain revenge upon one singular enemy, even with the strength of all the revived Red Lotus guild members. Furthermore, there were enemies beyond Bae Jaemin as well…

I nodded to show that I understood the plan. Seo Dawon motioned at me to materialize my status window. I docilely followed his instructions and floated the translucent screen between us.

He observed the minutiae of my stats and asked for me to take out the [Vengeful Ghost Essence] from the inventory. Deft fingers poked and examined the black wedge. “To summon Jung Garam, you’ll probably need to gain at least 10 levels.”

10 levels….

I was discouraged–despite the great increase in ability after reviving Seo Dawon, I was clearly lacking. To gain 10 levels at my usual rate…..

….No. Now that I have Seo Dawon, there's a chance that I can successfully participate in higher level Dungeons.

So, with furtive expectation, I asked Seo Dawon, "Wouldn't it be easy to raise my level if you were to carry me?"

"Did you forget that the servant and his contractor don't share the same experience pool?"

"Ah."

The contract I had signed with him, floating next to the status window, harshly reminded us of that limitation on line 5: "Party A and B do not share experience."

Does that mean a servant's kill won't be beneficial to my growth? If so, how am I supposed to level up when I can't leech any experience from these contracted servants?

However, Seo Dawon said, "Fortunately, at these low levels, you can scrape by on the virtue of items." With that, he opened the [Market Raid] app on my cell phone.

Welcome, User 'Choi Lee-Kyung1327'-nim! Would you like to browse the most popular items of the week?

The hottest items from the <Tower of Command> at one glance!

A new work by master alchemist 'Bang Sohyun,' who is registered as a User of interest by 'Choi Lee-kyung1327' has been released!

‘Choi Lee-kyung1327’-nim! Do you have any items for sale? Currently, the item [Valkyrie’s Shining Lock of Hair] is popular. Register now for free sales commissions on [Valkyrie’s Shining Lock of Hair]!

“I-I don’t have any money…..”

“Yeah, it looks like you don’t.” Seo Dawon kept browsing through the site while calmly replying to my frantic statements. He entered [Barnasium], an item I had never seen before, into the search engine.

Barnasium Statue (Search results…. 371 results found.)

[Buying Barnasium** Immediate purchase of intermediate quality or higher. 130 million per unit.]**

[Intermediate to High rank Barna~ Will buy straight away ^^] [3]

[Selling one Intermediate Barnasium for 1.8]

[Buying top grade Barnasium Statues. I’ll do my best to match your asking price. Please direct message me by User Alert app. ID: ggw1982]

“Ah, the market value dropped drastically….” Seo Dawon sighed regretfully, as if the 180 million selling price was a ‘big drop,’ and suddenly pressed [Begin direct User transaction] with my ID. I stared blankly at the message he sent: [For Sale, en masse, mid to highest grade Barnasium statues. Asking for 170 ~ 550 million per item]

He casually submitted the post; he wrote whatever he pleased without consulting me! Afterwards, he scrolled through my listings for sale that I had uploaded the day before. “Does anyone buy things like this?”

“No, wait! What did you just do?” “What?”

“Barnasium or whatever! Did you just post something for sale?”

“Uhuh.”

“You–do you have it?”

“I posted it because I have it.” As he spoke, Seo Dawon drew a line with his hand in the air. Along his finger’s trajectory, a golden line manifested. The line split apart to create a spatial gap; he stuck his hand in that distortion, pulled out a handful of round, sky-blue jewels, and set them on the dining table.

Automatically, I grasped the rolling sky-blue jewels. My touch activated the system, which updated as soon as I encountered new items.

You’ve acquired the ‘Highest grade Barnasium.’

A rare mineral that occurs only in the lair of Aesddeya, the ruler of the ‘Second Company.’ It increases the chances of reinforcing or strengthening <Legendary Grade> accessories (earrings, rings).

***The chance increases 3% by grade. (The base (intermediate) provides a 3% increase. Afterwards, each quality grade increases the chance by +3%. The highest grade Barnasium increases the chance by +9%.)**

“Back then, even the base quality would sell for 300 million…I guess the item’s supply deflated its value.”

I was shocked that he would ask 500 million won for this tiny little gem and was even more dumbfounded that Seo Dawon didn’t seem to be satisfied with his asking price….Oh my god….

“You….How many of these do you have?”

“About 35 of the highest grade ones?”

“…..”

I ran some mental calculations. If he succeeds with his 500 million asking price….17.5 billion won?! For me, who had never had more than 100 million in the bank account all my life, 17.5 billion was such an unfathomable, distant amount of money.

Before I could even express my incredulity, the alarm on the [Market Raid] app started to ring like crazy. “Ding! Ding! Ding!”

Ban Soohyun: Hello, I’d like to inquire about purchasing the highest grade Barnasium…

Hong Junghoon: I’d like to buy the Highest grade Barnasium. How many in total…

Kim Geumja: How many of the base quality do you have? Have you sold them all already?

Lee Hui-seok: Hello~ How many Barnasiums do you have? [4]

Seo-kyung: How are you! I want to ask about buying the Barnasiums!

Less than a minute after the posting was uploaded, 50 purchase inquiries flooded my inbox. ‘Barnasium’ had even trended in the [Market Raid] application’s real-time search popularity list.

It seems that news of someone selling a rare item in large quantities had spread throughout the community. Interested parties were quick to search for these opportunities. Seo Dawon began bargaining in the message inbox of the first buyer he contacted.

“Hey, tell me your account number,” he said.

“…..XX Bank, 613-XXXX-XXXX-XX-XXX….”

[Web Transaction]
XX/XX 16:25

Deposit: 1,440,000,000
Balance: 1,440, 537,448

Choi Lee-Kyung
613********
XX Bank

Buy Me a Coffee

Footnotes

1. I had a note about this before, but ssi is a subject ender of respect!
2. In gaming terms, this means that they’re going to work hard to gain massive amounts of experience/levels through various methods.
3. Two ‘s’ letters put together like this: , is often used instead of the emoticon ^^ in korean chat sites.
4. Actually, Lee Hui seok started the message with . Earlier, I said that translates to a casual Hi, right? is a sentence ender that denotes formality or respect. I chose to interpret it as a Formal Hello with a tilda at the end for whimsicality! This is probably something you guys didn’t need to know, but it’s a view into how confusing translating korean chat language can be at times.

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Chapter 31

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“I sold two of the best quality and two intermediate quality items.” If Seo Dawon hadn’t already warned me by asking me for my bank account number, I would have been staring, flabbergasted, at the deposit text.

I scrambled to inform the buyer of my home address; Seo Dawon advised me to put the Barnasiums in my inventory in advance, for the buyer would arrive soon.

Less than 30 minutes later, the doorbell rang outside my lodgings. I opened the gate with an awkward expression. “Hello?”

“Ah, hello…”

Behind the door, a woman with a sporty hairstyle [1] stared at me. She gave me a slightly suspicious look, so I hurriedly asked, “Are you Ban Soohyun?”

“Yes. Could we immediately complete the transaction?”

“Um, yes….” My appearance…my home…I knew I didn’t seem like someone who had the ability to sell something rare like the Barnasium.

In contrast, the buyer had a strange tattoo that spanned her face and neck. Her bracelets also seemed to advertise a special item effect. One needs the ability and money to strengthen legendary accessories….No doubt, she was some sort of ranker.

However, when I rushed to hand over the Barnasium from my inventory, her vigilance dampened. She quickly thanked me and bowed her head.

Before I could reach out and close the gates behind her as she left, she turned around and asked, “You know….where did you get this? The Barnasiums don’t drop that often, and so many were sold all at once….”

“What? Ah….” I colored in embarrassment; I couldn’t say that Seo Dawon had supplied everything. My ghostly partner noticed my hesitation and whispered, “I got lucky,” urging me to follow his explanation.

“I just….I guess I got lucky.”

The buyer opened her mouth as if to say more, but eventually turned away, chicly. “I envy you.”

My body stood rigidly until I saw her disappear around the corner of the alley; I closed the gate and sighed in relief.

This sort of interaction repeated about seven times.

Seo Dawon’s last top quality Barnasiums were sold to the Wyvern knight that landed in my front garden with his gargantuan white drake. With that, all of the items were sold out.

In just five hours, my bank account balance exceeded 22 billion won.

I stared at the deposit number as if I were dreaming. Even if Seo Dawon were to consider me tacky, I couldn’t tear my eyes off the unbelievable bounty.

“Seo Dawon…..” I murmured.

“?”

“T-this card…Please place it in your inventory.”

After I shook some sense into my brain, I handed over the credit card connected to the 22 billion won account.

Seo Dawon accepted while laughing, “Why? Do you think someone will steal it while you’re asleep?”

Was that the extent of his imagination? I was even fantasizing about a home burglary. Seo Dawon smiled at me, as I sputtered through my explanation; he did not deny any of the grim possibilities.

“Lee-kyung-ah.” He called out with a low tone that raised goosebumps all over my skin. [2]

“What?”

“You like money, don’t you?”

Why must he ask every single question that have such obvious answers? “Is there anyone who doesn’t?” I spat out, bluntly.

Seo Dawon’s smile deepened, “Do you want me to tell you how to make even more money–enough that today’s amount wouldn’t even be comparable?”

“….what?”

“The Red Lotus guild had a secret stash hidden away. Only I know how to crack the code to access the funds…so Bae Jaemin probably has no choice but to sit around and suck on his fingers.” [3]

Meanwhile, Seo Dawon stalked closer to me and whispered, lips touching my ears, the total amount. I couldn’t stop myself from gaping my mouth and staring at him in astonishment.

After lazily observing my reaction, Seo Dawon hit me with the proverbial sledgehammer. “If Bae Jaemin were to disappear, you’d be able to swallow all that money without anyone noticing. I can’t access that fund right now because others will certainly notice…selling Barnasiums was merely a pittance in comparison….”

“Money that I can ‘swallow’….T-then, do you mean to give me all of it?”

“I’m dead anyway; souls have no need of material goods. The same goes for the rest of my rascals at the guild.”

“But….”

“Don’t you think you should be paid for your part in the revenge?”

His last words strangely touched someplace held deep within my heart.

I mean…I’ve been inwardly dismayed at how I’ve been dragged into ‘something I have no stakes in.’ But his words felt like a sneak attack on the blurring border between us–our changing relationship. Of course, I may be nothing more than an intruder upon a greater scheme…but I truly did desire for Bae Jaemin’s downfall

But…Seo Dawon perhaps didn’t realize that. Furthermore, the amount he offered really did tempt my greed. I felt my heart beat faster and licked my dry lips. “Are you really going to give it all to me?”

“If you want, I can add this agreement to the terms of the contract.” Seo Dawon summoned the parchment-shaped vengeful ghost contract. I looked between his face and the newly added blank space at the end of the contract, eventually nodding at his suggestion.

Thus, an additional clause was added to our arrangement.

Additional terms have been uploaded. Do you want to renew your contract?

I pressed [Yes] in the message window; Seo Dawon also finished signing his consent. Our purposes were clear–Seo Dawon would get his revenge, and I would, for helping him in his journey, attain his abandoned wealth.

* * *

After such an eventful day, I felt sleep seducing me to her side, so I quickly washed up and readied myself for bed.

I was a bit concerned that Seo Dawon, who had been sitting on the sofa and watching TV until earlier, was absent. However, when I opened the door to the bedroom, he was lying peacefully on top of the bed.

No way….Is he sleeping?

There was only one bed in this house. If Seo Dawon were to claim it, there would be no place for me to sleep. Eventually, I tiptoed next to the mattress and asked, “Are you, perhaps, sleeping…?’’

Seo Dawon answered with his eyes still closed and mouth opened in a yawn, “I almost nodded off.”

“…..It’s possible for you to sleep?”

After listening to my genuine question, Seo Dawon opened his eyes with a frown, “Are you asking me why I’m sleeping when I don’t have a body? I shouldn’t be affected by a lack of physical stamina after I died, huh?”

“No, it’s just…” In fact, he pinpointed exactly what I had meant. However, his annoyed tone made me feel like I had said something wrong. I fished for an excuse, “No, it’s just….This is my bed.”

“Yes. And I made Lee-kyung-ie 22 billion today.”

“Haaa…..Fine, Fine.” Though his words were provocative, I yielded and apologized for my thoughtless words. Since Seo Dawon didn’t seem like he wanted to move, I decided to lay a blanket on the floor and sleep on the ground.

“Lee-kyung-ah, you’re going to sleep already?”

“Yeah. I’m tired….”

“What’s up with your stamina?”

“…….”

Does he even know how much I’ve struggled today? Frustration rose up from my throat, but I eventually swallowed it all down. For 22 billion won, I could endure more injustices.

And, now that I think about it, things ended well for me today. In one day, I had nearly drowned in a lake, got chased by monsters, fallen from a great height, almost got murdered by Bae Jaemin, and, finally, signed a contract with Seo Dawon’s vengeful spirit…Additionally, I made a profit off of high level Users by selling Barnasiums.

I was far too tired to summarize all that had happened to me; I raised the blanket over my head, hoping that my actions would suffice as a response.

On the bed, Seo Dawon pulled on my blanket and asked again, “Are you really going to sleep?”

You punk….If you’re bored, go play around with my cell phone.

“I almost died dozens of times today…..” I slurred. Perhaps my weariness shone through as I spoke, Seo Dawon loosened his hold on my covers.

He continued to ask, despite the slackened hold, “How did you manage to arrive at my last resting site?”

I guess he’s curious about everything–he’s lost three years, and more information could only help advance his goals…Eventually, I bit back a sigh and answered patiently, though my words were laden with sleep-influenced babbles. It was hard for him to decipher a clear meaning.

“Fell into water….Trap….Io threw me in….Ha….With Lackey….”

“Ah, that’s right. You said you originally entered the dungeon for an evolution ingredient for your servant. By the way, what’s with the name, Lackey? Did you name it?”

“Mhmmm…..It’s just…my number one servant…”

He asked another question, but, sliding in between the realms of consciousness, I couldn’t quite properly hear what he had said. I remembered nothing more after that.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Dawon’s no longer a splenda daddy, huh…lmao.

Footnotes

1. This hairstyle, in the original novel, is called Sports hair. Aka it’s a men’s cut that is shared among many athletes. Different variations such as the round or square sports hair exist. They all have in common a uniform fringe.
2. Remember, “ah” at the end of the name is a term of endearment~
3. Sucking fingers means to just wait on the sidelines. Idiom~ I usually find english substitutes, but this one is so amusing, I left it in!

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Chapter 32

Chapter 32

[Clack clack clack!]

I woke up from something hard burrowing into my embrace, jabbing my fleshy body. Its weight pressed down upon my chest, making it hard to breathe.

Involuntarily, I gave a low groan as I opened my eyes–the previous day's overwork had led to inevitable muscle pain. Through the narrow slits of my sleep-addled eyes, I saw Seo Dawon staring back at me for who knows how long.

"Gah!"

"Did you sleep well?" Seo Dawon said.

The shock of seeing his face had made me forget that there was something else pressing down upon my body.

So, I jumped up with little regard to what used to be lying on my chest. Only after seeing a skull rattle across the ground at my feet did I realize Lackey had reappeared.

[Clack Clack….]

"Gah! Lackey!"

Finally! The 24-hour cooldown time had passed!

I lifted up the still sulking Lackey and hugged him like a little puppy. With a sullen expression, Lackey burrowed itself into my arms, clacking its teeth furiously.

“It’s 3:00 pm now,” Seo Dawon said.

“Really?”

“You’ve gotten nearly 20 hours of sleep.”

I noticed Seo Dawon glancing at Lackey, who was rubbing its face against my comforting arms.

I had slept long enough that the sun had begun to hang low outside the window–as if evening was slowly bleeding into the sky. “Why didn’t you wake me up…?” I scratched my head in embarrassment.

Seo Dawon replied, “I was going to….” He stared at Lackey in my arms, “That thing tried to bite me, though?”

“….Lackey?”

“Yeah.”

That can’t be right….?

For the year that we spent together, Lackey was always perfectly calm and quiet unless I ordered an attack. I had even begun to carry it around everywhere because the skeleton was so prone to being chased and bitten by the neighborhood dogs…Is he saying this bullied child would bite someone like Seo Dawon who was so much bigger and stronger?

“Are you sure you didn’t do something?”

“–? I just tried to shake you a bit to wake you up?”

“But Lackey’s someone that can’t even win against a dog smaller than itself.” I said as I stroked Lackey’s smooth skull. At the affectionate touch,

Lackey gave a perfunctory [Clack Clack!] while wiggling in joy. As expected, Lackey really is the cutest….

“Wow, it can even act?” Dawon grumbled.

His frustrated tone seemed quite sincere, so I looked between the ghost and Lackey, trying to puzzle out their animosity.

A thought suddenly distracted me, however. I remembered that I obtained the ingredient needed to strengthen it and opened up its status window. Originally, I had intended to skip straight to the strengthening process, but my eyes snagged at the ‘current mood’ section while scrolling.

Current Mood: I’ll never forgive you…Master is mine!

Is it….talking about Seo Dawon?

I looked down at Lackey. Though the skeleton was securely placed within my arms, it would often overtly glare at Seo Dawon.

Should I say it was similar to my family’s Maltese, Jjong-ie, back home? If there was anything that Jjong-ie hated, it would often glare at it suspiciously. If that hated person drew closer, the indignant Maltese would bark or bite as a last resort. The thought of comparing Lackey to a small dog was so adorable, I couldn’t help the smile that involuntarily grew on my face.

I kissed its forehead, as if to soothe its riled spirit. Although the [current mood] had not changed, my affections must have pleased Lackey, somewhat. Its feet and body wriggled in happiness, and my smile deepened.

“What are you doing?” Seo Dawon asked.

“Hey, so Lackey….It seems that Lackey’s in a bad mood because of you.”

“Why?”

“Umm…..I think it’s noticed that you’re another contracted servant.”

“What about it? Don’t tell me…it’s jealous?”

“Something like that?”

Seo Dawon gave me a disbelieving stare, but I paid little attention to him. Instead, I began murmuring words of comfort to the little skeleton, “Cheer up~ Our Lackey is the best~” I supported its bottom and began to twirl Lackey around. After a while, Lackey chattered its teeth together in a simulacrum of giggle; the sound melted my heart.

Of course, Seo Dawon only scornfully snorted at the heartwarming scene.

I said to him, defending Lackey, “Hey, think of him like a jealous little puppy….”

Seo Dawon ignored that and instead changed the subject, “Hey, when are we going out?”

I suggested we evolve Lackey before leaving the house. As I bled sweat and tears in order to retrieve this precious ingredient, I was impatient to see the fruits of my efforts.

[Clack clack?]

“You’ve also suffered all this time, serving such a useless master…”

[Clack clack! Clack clack!]

It shook its head, denying my words, as if it understood everything I had said. I was choked with emotions, recalling the hardships the two of us shared this past year.

Lackey….I don’t need anything else…Let’s walk the flower path, like an animist’s spirit….Please… [1]

[Materials needed to evolve ‘Lackey’ are as follows.]

Low-grade reinforcement stone…….1 (1/1)
Crimson Tail-feather……..20 (20/20)
Honey from a Tilted Bee…….1 (1/1)
Dried Frog Skin……..10 (10/10)
Contaminated Dark Liquid…….1 (1/1)

I double checked to see if all the required materials were gathered and placed Lackey on the floor in front of me, upright. Lackey stood solemnly, not begging for continued hugs unlike its usual behavior–perhaps it noticed the importance of the situation.

After looking through Lackey’s status window, I pressed the shiny, golden button to begin consolidating power within my servant.

The ingredients I prepared slowly began to glow; they melted into bright light particles and began to disappear.

Lackey’s body began to resonate and shine brightly as well, as if it were just another ingredient. My heart was gripped with anxiety when the last material [contaminated dark liquid] disappeared.

I gritted my teeth while thinking about the effort needed to retrieve it. But….in that process…I also met and revived Seo Dawon. Furthermore, my account balance increased by 22 billion yesterday. In a way, I gained more than I could have possibly lost; perhaps it was a good thing to have suffered

through all these hardships. Just a while ago, I felt bone deep pain at parting with 4 million won to pay for Kim Sangyoon’s services.

But now…

All ingredients needed to strengthen your servant have been prepared.

Your Servant, ‘Lackey,’ is now about to evolve.

Updating….Please wait one moment.

Interrupting my thoughts, a magic circle unfolded underneath Lackey’s feet. A strange fog enveloped its body, obscuring all but its hazy silhouette.

The system message informed us [Evolution will soon be completed. 10….9….8…].

My eyes closed with the rhythmic countdown, praying to whatever deity exists. ‘Please. Please let it be as strong as an Animist’s spirit. Please….!’

Your servant, ‘Lackey,’ has successfully evolved.

Low-grade skeleton has been promoted into an Intermediate Skeleton (+1).

With the promotion, you can choose to develop your skeleton into one of two types available.

You may choose between ‘Dark Magician’ and ‘Skeleton Solider.’

The ‘Dark Magician’ is a powerful curse caster who can master the <Mirror Mage> skill, returning power attacks back at its enemies. The magician can cause its enemies to experience constant confusion, degradation, and other abnormal effects.

After selecting the ‘Dark Magician,’ the servant can be nurtured and further promoted into these subcategories: Dark Magician –> Phantom Mage –> Lich –> ArchLich.

The ‘Skeleton Soldier’ a close-ranged physical infantryman that uses spears and one-handed swords to protect their summoner. The type boasts immense stamina and attack values. If surrounded by enemies, it can use <Undead Charge> to break through enemy lines.

After selecting the ‘Skeleton Soldier,’ the servant can be nurtured and further promoted into these subcategories: Skeleton Soldier –> Dark Ranger –> Bloody Expert–> Death Knight.

After a deluge of messages, the fog lifted, and Lackey was revealed.

Previously, it was as large as a very small infant, but now it had grown to almost 160 (cm? the author never said). Its white bones which previously so brittle also thickened and strengthened.

In addition, a purple jewel formed inside the empty rib cage–right where the heart should be. Fascinatingly, the heart blinked as if it were simulating heart beats.

Strangely, Lackey’s unique blue, pulsating eyes did not return, so the transformation felt incomplete.

Out of the corner of my eye, the evolution window flashed again. I realized that the transformation couldn’t continue unless I chose between the two types: Dark Mage and Skeleton Soldier.

However, it was difficult to choose, considering the pros and cons to such clearly delineated paths: warrior or caster. Eventually, I asked for help from Seo Dawon, who was leaning on the sofa.

“Seo Dawon.”

“Yeah?”

“The evolution succeeded but…the evolution tree is divided into two paths.”

Seo Dawon replied without a moment’s delay, “Just go for the Skeleton Soldier.”

“Is the Dark Mage worse?”

“To put it simply, the Mage position is already filled. You don’t need another because you have me.”

Convinced, I pressed the [Skeleton Soldier] button.

Are you sure you want to evolve it into a ‘Skeleton Soldier?’ Once selected, the decision cannot be reversed.

I pressed [Yes] quickly, and, immediately afterwards, Lackey’s blue eyes shone from the recesses of its skull.

TL: Mara, my PR, and I kinda die of cuteness every time Lackey’s on the page.

Footnotes

1. Walk the flower path is a common saying in Korea that means having a fortunate, fruitful life.

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Chapter 33

Chapter 33

Not only did the lights within Lackey’s eye sockets return, the clothes that Lackey wore during its low-grade skeleton phase also began to change.

The yellow gloves turned black and were resized to fit the larger hands. The design changed from a looser fit to a bone-tight design. On top of that, something that appeared to be a uniform made out of black leather gently cushioned Lackey’s white joints.

It was a bit unusual seeing the clothes ripple and change before my very eyes–like a magical girl transformation. [1] With the new uniform, Lackey looked like a proper menacing undead monster.

If previously Lackey projected a cute, pet-like aura, the enhanced Lackey looked closer to a proper ‘Servant.’ Completing the image, it gripped a charcoal-black weapon in its gloved hands–a swordsman that had risen from the ashes of ruin

[Clack Clack!]

As soon as the light of sentience returned to its blue, glowing eyes, Lackey jumped straight for me. Then, as if surprised by its changed body, it hesitated and observed its own hands. While moving, it had stumbled around, as if it had not yet adjusted to its new depth perception.

I ran to the hesitant Lackey and dragged him into my embrace. After a pause, Lackey also opened its arms wide and clung onto my chest. Its usual

grip was now incompatible with its height, but I was quite pleased with Lackey's strengthened grip force.

Wow…I didn't know the change would be so drastic…

As Lackey continued to cling, I opened its status window, flush with anticipation.

[Lackey – 'Choi Lee-kyung's' servant.]
Rank: Intermediate Skeleton (Skeleton Soldier) +1

HP – 55,500/55,500
MP – 10,000/10,000
Loyalty: Very High
Disposition: Darkness, Evil, Persistence, Obsessive, Destructive

Current Mood: '….??! I got bigger?!'

Durability: Infinite (If it is attacked for more than its total health, the skeleton will be reverse summoned back into Choi Lee-kyung's personal space, and the user will sustain the overflow damage. Re-summon Cooldown time: 24 hours)

Stat:

Strength + 70,000
Magic +25,000
Stamina + 66,000
Agility + 22,000

Physical critical damage: 48%
Maximum physical damage: 30%
Minimum physical damage: 25% (???)

Enemy Armor Penetration: 27%
Enemy Resistance Penetration: 33%

Skill:

– Clacking: It can make some sounds. A low level of communication is possible.

-**Bite:** ‘My teeth were strong even before death!’ Your skeleton can attack the enemy by biting.

– Bite (+1): While biting the enemy, critical chance increases by 12%

– Basic slashes: The skeleton soldier increases its proficiency with its ‘sword of darkness’ the more it utilizes it. After mastering its basics, the skeleton will have an increase of 3% attack power in any of its skill attacks.

-Undead Charging: A powerful charge skill that pierces through the hardest of sieges. For 2 minutes, the Servant’s stats increase by 100% (Cooldown time 25 minutes) (The Skill level can be increased through reinforcement)

Reinforcement – You currently lack the materials needed for reinforcement

Wow….

That’s unbelievable. How much did Lackey’s stats increase?

I guessed that it would have become more powerful just from looking at the appearance alone, but I was shocked to confirm that thought.

Additionally, while checking the status window, I realized that I had stealthily gained three levels.

It seems as if a Necromancer was a class that spiked in experience whenever they recruit a new servant or when contracted servants grow in power. I briefly glanced over the minor changes in stats with my level ups and happily informed Seo Dawon of all that had happened.

“So, you level up even when you strengthen your servants?” He reiterated.

“That’s right! It happened the last time as well: when we finished our contract, my level spiked considerably. Maybe it’s a pattern for Necromancers.”

Seo Dawon, after listening to my explanation, nodded, “Mages also receive large amounts of additional experiences when they discover special skills or favorable fusions between their existing spells….Perhaps it’s a similar sort of system.”

Seo Dawon, who looked quite lukewarm at Lackey’s impressive transformation, brightened his expression at the knowledge that my level was just a few steps closer to our goal.

“Then, shall we leave to shop for some items?” He said.

With all the recent success, I grabbed my coat with levity.

Lackey, still unused to its new body, followed closely along. Although it grew larger, it continued to act the way it did previously. I reached out a hand to pat its head but stopped, since Lackey’s skull was now near eye level. Without thinking, I murmured, “It’s not long now until I’ll no longer be able to pat you like this…”

It’s not like I had no desire to continue to baby Lackey, but Lackey might continue to grow larger with every strengthening…I felt a bit bittersweet, but was more proud of its extraordinary growth.

–Poof!

Mist spread across the ground simultaneously with the sound of a bomb– an explosion. Little Lackey, its original appearance, floundered at my feet.

I was worried that the evolution had reversed and shouted in alarm, “What’s this?!”

Servant ‘Lackey’ can select the desired appearance from each stage of reinforcement unlocked.

However, if appearance is set randomly, some skills may not be available.

It is impossible to choose an appearance that corresponds to a stage that hasn’t been unlocked.

Fortunately, however, it seems that the whole process had not been canceled. As if the system was automatically responding to my words, it informed me of Lackey’s options.

Of course, Lackey’s enhanced appearance was quite good and I liked it, but I was worried and wistful for Lackey’s previous child-like image. I thought I’d never see it again.

Lackey was once again staring at its hands while in my embrace, as if it had yet to understand the whole situation.

Current Mood: I changed back….!

Ah, it’s so cute!

I couldn’t resist peppering kisses all over Lackey’s smooth forehead. I didn’t return to my senses until my eyes met Seo Dawon’s impatient gaze, which seemed to say, ‘How long are you planning to continue?’

I coughed, “Ahem….Shall we leave?”

Through my embarrassed flush, I realized that Seo Dawon must be a cold-blooded person who certainly had never raised any pets like puppies or kittens.

Lackey was…..Of course, Lackey was quite off-putting at first since it was a skeleton…but he’s such a lovable little thing. You can’t help but fall in love the more you see it. It melts my heart to see Lackey toddling around, struggling pointlessly, until it runs to my legs, begging me to help out…

Perhaps my kisses cause a tickling sensation, Lackey always wriggles its feet whenever I do it. The squirms never fail to make my fists clench from cuteness overload. [2] Whenever I missed Jjong-ie, [3] Lackey filled my hollow heart.

“You act just like Jo Chan-young. Are all summoners like this?” Seo Dawon casually remarked, staring strangely at the skeleton in my arms, and stepped onto the porch.

Jo Chan-young? Where have I heard that name….

Seeing my confused expression, Seo Dawon patiently explained (though the way he spoke was quite blunt and aggravating), “I’m talking about the summoner. The one with the irezumi tattoos on his arm.” [4]

“Ah! Huh? You’re saying I resemble him?”

“You act similarly. Jo Chan-young also called out his Kirins and Phoenixes to fawn over them all day, calling them cute.” [5]

That man was situated so far away in Seo Dawon’s memory; I couldn’t even recall his face nor remember him all that well….But, whatever! What’s wrong with affection?

“Don’t you think summons are cute? I think Lackey is honestly on the adorable side.”

“You should have seen it go berserk this morning.”

“It’s obviously a baby….”

“How old is it?”

What on earth, is he seriously asking about this?

No matter how old Lackey got, its age would always mean something different to humans. Although Jjong-ie is 10 years old, a grandfather in dog years, he has always been a baby in our family.

I firmly stated, “Lackey was born when I chose a class, so it’s one year old now.”

Seo Dawon, however, did not respond and instead suddenly pressed on Lackey’s forehead, as if he were teasing it.

Then, lightning fast, Lackey snapped its teeth, trying to bite at Seo Dawon’s hands. I was a bit startled; I had never seen Lackey behaving this way before.

“See that?” Seo Dawon said.

I mean…Disregarding Lackey’s behavior, why are you acting as if it’s all Lackey’s fault when you picked a fight with it first?

After a deep sigh, I said, “Don’t provoke it.”

“Wow. Look at this discrimination.”

“Be as cute as Lackey then.”

Looking at us bickering, Lackey opened its mouth chattered quietly, as if it was giggling.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: More than anything, I adore the banter.

Also, if you’re wondering why I’ve been turbo updating lately…I’ve recently finished my finals. Since I read as I translate, I’m translating a lot since I want to know what happens >.<

Footnotes

1. think sailor moon lmao
2. It’s common in Korea to say that something cute makes your fists clench! Cute aggression is a thing, search it up :D
3. That’s the family dog
4. Irezumi are japanese tattoos done by hand, no machine
5. The original literal translation is to “Bite and suck” which is, once again, another reference to cute aggression! You bite at things that are cute….idiomatically ofc. I think the closest translation in English is to fawn over something.

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Chapter 34

Chapter 34

There were a total of three department stores on the Hub’s main street.

They were distributed an even block away from each other, in a triangle formation. H Department Store was populated by storefronts that focused on selling combat weapons; S Department Store was famous for its armor and other popular workshop products. (S store stocked the largest number of products from the DAA brand.) And, N Department Store mainly focused on consumables like skill scrolls or accessories with special abilities. Of course, we first headed towards S Mall.

The Department stores were always packed with people. After dungeoneering, Users would often have nowhere else to go but to shop at malls and the nearby boutiques, spending their hard earned profits. Before, I had not ventured near these places because of the filthy high prices and the stinging gazes of those that looked upon Necromancers as if they were some spectacle.

However, today was different.

Of course, like any other day, there were quite a few people curiously staring at Lackey in my arms, but…..

I now have 22 billion won in my bank account.

Not, 200 million, 22 billion!

Fantasies of things I needed to buy filled my head and I had no space to afford concerning myself with the others' gazes.

"What should I buy after the uniform? Should I grab a pair of shoes?"

"Shoes, accessories, inventory expansions…..Consumable scrolls… Emergency escapes as well." Dawon replied.

[Clack Clack!]

"Hmmmm…I might forget things like this. I better write it all down."

"I'll just remind you." Seo Dawon spoke confidently.

In the end, believing in his confidence, I lowered my cell phone which I was going to use as a memo pad. If I forget anything today…I can just come back again. Hearts buoyant with excitement, we finally stepped into the S Department Store.

The mall we walked into had the largest number of stores, boasting a vast and open interior. The vaulted floor plan gave a refreshing feeling as soon as you entered. Without delay, Seo Dawon took the lead. After looking around in awe, I refocused and followed behind him.

First, he identified the DAA's store location using the map at the front information desk. DAA, the mecca for the top-priority uniform brands, was on the fourth floor.

"Ah, it's over there." Seo Dawon said, as we exited the elevator; the DAA store was almost exactly opposite from where we were. I don't know if we arrived at a busy time or if this was a usual experience, but there were throngs of people gathering at its door.

Wasn't DAA a super expensive brand? There sure are a lot of rich people in Korea….Though, I guess it's weird for me to pass judgement when I, too, also arrived to buy a uniform.

But I did suddenly get rich yesterday.

The jacket worn by the person in front of me was also part of the DAA brand. Of course, it was for fashionable use and not an “item,” but, even so, the jacket must have a price tag in the millions of wons….

“Hello, what are you looking for?” An attendant asked a nearby customer.

Since so many surrounded us, I found it hard to talk to Seo Dawon. Instead, I wasted time by observing the surrounding people…

One attendant must accompany each customer team; buyers could not enter the store without employee response. Still, my turn came sooner than I had expected. A DAA manager dressed in a suit approached me with a winning smile and asked me what I was looking for. I involuntarily glanced at Seo Dawon, but he only responded with a pointed and puzzled glance.

I remembered that others could not easily perceive my ghostly partner, so I quickly avoided his gaze and responded to the DAA staff, “I’m….I’m here to check out the combat uniforms.”

“Oh, the uniforms? Excuse me, please wait for a moment.” The employee disappeared, and soon another employee with a different name tag approached me.

“Hello. I’m here as the one in charge of the combat uniform line. My name is Manager Lee Jihye.”

“Ah, I see…” I bowed my head as she greeted me.

The manager took us up the stairs to the second floor of the DAA store. I was a bit embarrassed as a party on the first floor, selecting brand name wallets, stared at me as I walked up. Maybe the uniform was especially expensive..maybe I was just feeling too self-conscious…

Anyways, there were about four or five people before me on the second floor. As I arrived, they began scanning me with a prickling gaze unique to Users.

Even though no one was particularly geared with anything combat related, I flinched with cold feet at their forceful poise….But, before I could do something stupid, Seo Dawon grabbed my arm and safely led me away from the Users and to the sofa the manager indicated.

Lee Jihye seated me and asked if I wanted a drink; I shook my head. Then, she placed a tablet on the table in front of me. The screen displayed some sort of survey.

1) Customer-nim, what is your class?

Hnrk. What's this, some kind of investigation? I was at a loss from the very first question.

I looked at the manager sitting beside me in bewilderment, and she began to talk to me in a friendly manner when our eyes met. "Perhaps…Have you previously purchased a uniform from our store?"

"N-no…."

"Then, is this your first time here?"

"Yes….But, what is this questionnaire?"

"Oh, our questionnaire asks for basic information in order to find a more suitable product for you. Our uniform line is a highly customized product that allows customers to make requests for the DAA workshop and its affiliates: for example, custom enchantments and other options."

"I see…." I glanced at Seo Dawon, but he, too, was listening to the explanation without a word, without any reaction to note truth or falsehood.

Had Seo Dawon never worn a product from this place either? Or had the brand changed in the past three years….? In the end, mindful of the other's time and attention, I began writing into the tablet's touch screen.

Class, color preference, the dungeons I frequent…all that was readily answered, but I was briefly stumped when the questionnaire asked me to choose the three most necessary options to add onto the uniforms. What on earth…they have over 100 recommended options and they expect me to choose only three out of that many?

“Choose annulment of 1 magic attack, auto-thermal control, and defence MAX for your three options.” In the nick of time, Seo Dawon informed me of his opinion.

I didn’t panic and chose what he had pinpointed and returned the tablet to the manager.

I was worried that she would laugh at the ‘Necromancer’ written in the class column, but that didn’t happen.

Rather, she smiled saying that the three options I had chosen were the most popular combination ordered. The words were nothing special, but I somehow felt like I had made the correct choice.

‘Wow, managers at expensive stores really are good at making customers feel special.’ I thought.

“Now, with the three main options that you’ve chosen, we have 33 additional customizations that can also be added. Up to 33 options may be chosen at this time.” She switched to another screen and once again showed me the questionnaire.

Each additional customization was accompanied by a brief description, an example image, and, kindly, the price. Though the price range varied widely, the cheapest one was 10 million won. I thought I had misread the number of zeroes, and looked at it again, but the quotes were correct.

Honestly….these aren’t airplane customization options, why are they so expensive?

The manager, perhaps gauging my astonishment, began to explain, “Because our uniforms are made of dragon leather, we have an

overwhelming advantage in durability over the other rival premium brand lines. However, the material is a bit tricky to process. We have to penetrate the innate anti-magic properties of dragon leather and deal with the toughness while trying to add the customized skills….It's a very difficult task. So, our prices cost twice as much compared to any other leather."

But, Seo Dawon who was reading the screen even before her explanation ended, said "Let's add all the options."

I looked at him with wide eyes, but he neatly ignored my surprise and gently admonished, "You shouldn't be looking at me right now."

The manager still maintained her friendly tone as she continued, "If you're having a hard time choosing between the options, I'd recommend these four steady…."

At Seo Dawon's urging, I eventually gulped down my pooling spit and said, "Add everything."

"Sir?"

"All of it. Please give me all the additional options."

For a brief moment, surprise surfaced in the manager's expression, but she recovered quickly. "Yes, of course. All 33 additional options?"

I nodded; she handed over the tablet and motioned for me to sign at the bottom.

The rest was handled similarly.

After finalizing the body options, Seo Dawon similarly ordered the best choices or all available choices for the arms, legs, and breastplate. In the end, the uniform bill in front of me totaled 4.5 billion won.

"Let's double check your customizations. The basic design is the Zejira R4 black, you've ordered the best of all the Super Armors and the customized….."

After a neat 360 degree spin on the tablet, the projected design sample was comparable to the cost of a sports car.

Before I slid the credit card, I felt breathless. What if the payment gets rejected? Fortunately, however, the payment was processed normally, and the manager sent the receipt certificate to my cell phone.

She finished the interaction with a bright and friendly smile full of capitalist vigor. “Thank you so much for your patronage, Choi Lee-kyung-nim. We will contact you in 4 days, or feel free to visit us on another convenient date.”

Just as I was about to turn and leave, following the manager’s farewell, I suddenly heard a loud noise from outside the store.

TL: My heart stopped when they spent 4.5 billion…I’m such a penny-pincher…

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Chapter 35

Chapter 35

“It’s Bae Jaemin!”

“Wow, Bae Jaemin….”

“Hey, look over there!”

It was soon clear who the main character of the disturbance was–a man wearing a black eye patch riding the escalator….I didn’t expect to be in such close proximity to Bae Jaemin once again, so I blankly watched him arrive on this floor.

Bae Jaemin was talking to the people beside him–guild members or guards?–and the crowd was readily filming his appearance with their cell phones.

People on the other floors also rushed to the edge, eager to see him from afar. He was almost like an idol that had arrived at the airport.

“Jaemin Hyung, you’re so cool!” Right next to me, a man suddenly shouted his admiration for Bae Jaemin.

It was only a day after the <Tower of Command> raid, so fan sentiment for the man seemed to be uncontrollable.

His deep voice–I could almost feel the rumbling–responded, “Thank you.”

What was even more frustrating was that Bae Jaemin smiled naturally, experienced as any other celebrity, and bowed his head to the fan.

And, following the man, others drew closer, shouting compliments. The clicking of camera phones filled the area. I frowned as I watched the scene, and, next to me, Seo Dawon stood abruptly.

“Let’s go…” I softly said, calling out to him. Seo Dawon looked at Bae Jaemin as if he were getting sucked in by the dark depths of his gaze, and only tore his eyes away at my call.

I was surprised at what I saw in his eyes.

The boiling hot vigor that had been directed at Bae Jaemin and was now pointed my way. After Seo Dawon saw my pause, he sighed once, and quickly reconstructed his smiling face.

“Let’s level up quickly, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“…..”

“He’s just right there in front of my nose. He’s so annoying to watch.” He mumbled lightly. I felt sorry–somehow I felt that he had been trying his hardest to dampen his emotions.

All I could do was to raise my specs so that he can properly exhibit all his abilities, but I’m unable to fulfill those desires currently….So, I unconsciously patted his arm to cheer him up.

For others, it would have seemed like I’m patting the air…However, I locked gazes with Bae Jaemin, who was looking at me from a distance.

“…..huh?”

“What is it?”

Am I mistaken?

I lowered my head awkwardly and spoke in a small voice that only Seo Dawon could hear, “I think I just made eye contact with Bae Jaemin.” Then, turning my head, I asked, “That’s not true, right?”

However, Seo Dawon dashed my hopes, “I think he’s really looking at you, though?”

“…..Really?”

“Yeah. What gives?” Seo Dawon said, as if he also didn’t expect this sort of development.

In a hurry, I turned my back on the traitor and asked, “Is he still looking at me?”

Seo Dawon replied, “He’s not just looking…He’s coming your way.”

Lackey, feeling my heart beat rise through the connection between its skull and my chest, looked up at me.

“S-should we run away?”

“Now? Running away from here….would seem a bit weird.”

“Then why is he coming near me? Did he…Did he notice something off?”

“Just be calm for now. Maybe he has something to do over here.”

“Ah….maybe?” I was positioned in front of the DAA store, where I had just bought a uniform. Perhaps Bae Jaemin also had business in this store.

Only then did some of the tenseness seep away from my shoulders. I began to step towards the halls, away from the entrance of the store.

However, Seo Dawon, who continued to monitor Bae Jaemin’s movements, suddenly informed me, “Hey, that’s not it. He definitely saw you and is following you.”

I was about to turn my head to look, but stopped at Seo Dawon's further instructions. "Just look forward and walk straight ahead." My feet quickly moved according to his recommendation.

"Excuse me."

However, it seemed that Bae Jaemin had no intention of hiding his pursuit.

The clear and beautiful voice, for a man, was definitely Bae Jaemin's. Without looking, I could tell that I was the target of his words. I knew he was calling for me, but I pretended not to hear and once again resumed walking forward.

The fear of his lantern, back at the Tower of Command, still lingered within me…The thought of running into him again was terrifying. Ah, please, why the hell is he calling out to me?

"Please, wait a moment."

But it seems I was already his target; Bae Jaemin doggedly chased in pursuit, unwilling to lose me at all costs. After a *whoosh*, an unusually cold stream of air brushed past my arm. Before I knew it, I was close enough to bump my nose into what seemed to be a beige knit sweater.

As I looked up in surprise, the man I had so desperately wanted to avoid looked down at me.

Light brown, drooping eyes and a subtle yet friendly smile….I still quickly escaped his arms and screamed, "W-What is it?!"

Wow, this jerk, did he really use his skills to block my way just now?

"I'm so sorry. I called to you, but it seems like you didn't hear me…" Bae Jaemin looked straight at me. Only his words seemed apologetic, his vocal inflection was quite soulless.

Though his gaze was half as potent, the one eye not blocked by the eyepatch had such intimidating spirit that I lowered my head

subconsciously. Bae Jaemin took as many steps towards me as I had retreated and said, “Well, this might sound a bit strange, but…”

He paused.

I stepped backwards, moving in instinctive fear; Seo Dawon caught me by the shoulders, however, and I gradually regained some courage at his firm touch. Stopping the retreat, I looked up at Bae Jaemin with little confidence

I think Bae Jaemin was staring at me the entire time. I regretted looking directly into his eyes once again, as I froze, unable to do this or that–caught between a rock and a hard place.

Seo Dawon’s steady presence behind me helped to put a bit of my anxiety to sleep; he, alone, was the sole presence that eased my heart and helped me regain some of my former complexion.

Bae Jaemin still persistently observed my face and finally spat out his business, “By any chance…haven’t we seen each other somewhere?”

“What? No?”

“Really? But why do you look so familiar?”

Don’t tell me…did he recognize me?

Bae Jaemin definitely shone his lantern on me for a very brief moment back in the Tower of Command. No matter how hard I think, besides that, Bae Jaemin and I have never crossed paths before.

So, the issue is whether or not he grabbed onto me while fully recognizing my face, knowing the circumstances of our meeting, or whether he grabbed me on some vague whim.

So, I decided to detach myself from this situation at all costs. “I’m sorry, but I really don’t have time to be talking to you like this….I sincerely think you have the wrong person. After all, I’ve only ever seen you on TV.”

Then, I took a sneaky glance at my surroundings.

Bae Jaemin was conscious of my gaze, even though he didn't tear his eyes away from mine. I had hoped he would realize how many people gathered around us.

As expected, he became conscious of the surrounding gossipers. The people wondered why Bae Jaemin was confronting someone so plebeian, whispering 'What's going on?' among themselves.

If in this situation he continues to act in such a forceful manner, then I could be sure he would have some reasonable suspicion about our encounter in the Tower of Command. And, if he were to retreat, I was sure to escape this momentary crisis. Even if he were to suspect me, there was no evidence to prove his suspicions, and I calculated that he wouldn't break character in public.

However, he reacted in a completely different manner compared to my expectations….

"Then, can we exchange numbers?"

"…..What?"

"Right now…It's obvious that you're busy and we're surrounded by so many curious eyes. I can't possibly hold you here….but if you were to grant me around one hour of your time…?"

Why does he sound so cheesy….?

For those that didn't know the situation, It would seem as if Bae Jaemin…To me….Ah, forget it. It would be so nauseating to finish that train of thought.

And of course, without knowing his true intentions, I tried to end things in a single stroke, "Well, I'm not sure why I should agree to this…"

As soon as he noticed the negative nuance in my words, Bae Jaemin exclaimed, "Seeing how reluctant you are…As expected, you know me

from before, don't you?"

Ah…Damn it….

How funny. If I tell him to piss off, that's a sign that we knew each other in the past? It's not as if he's entirely wrong either….

As I contemplated how best to reject him, some people passed by with confident strides and approached Bae Jaemin.

"All of a sudden, using your warp to rush past us….What are you doing, huh?"

"Who is he? Do you two know each other?"

"…..Oh my?" One of the people in the approaching group was the tattooed woman who came to my house yesterday to buy a Barnasium. Her eyes widened as she saw me.

Bae Jaemin noticed her reaction, pointed at me, and asked, "Do you know him?"

I wanted to stop her from responding, but she answered in a chic manner, "He was the one who mass sold a bunch of Barnasiums yesterday."

Bae Jaemin simply crooned a thoughtful exclamation.

In total, four pairs of eyes looked at me with interest.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Have two more chapters~ I have a bit stockpiled now. Is Bae Jaemin hitting on him? or does he want to kill him? Jury's out on this one.

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Chapter 36

Chapter 36

TL: I've decided to translate [River and Sea] guild with the phonetic equivalent: HaHae. I felt that the former was too wordy and the latter would flow better on the tongue. Sorry for the confusion!

"Ah! So that's him!" Among the three that followed Bae Jaemin, one of them, a large man who towered over us all–standing at least 2 meters tall–smiled at me.

He was the man who looked like a bodyguard as he accompanied Bae Jaemin up the escalator. Properly seen front the front, he sported a scarred gash diagonally across his face. Despite his polite smile, the scar left a bloody and rough impression.

I don't think he could be a professional bodyguard with a face like that…I assumed that he was Bae Jaemin's friend or, perhaps, a member of the newly formed [HaHae] guild. He also appeared to be a Warrior?

"What's your relationship with our guild master-nim?" A man with green bobbed hair and round glasses, creating an overall bookish appearance, intervened cooly from the left.

I felt a strange animosity I couldn't quite understand as they gave me an assessing glance. I had only briefly met their eyes, but their gaze was colder than when raid parties had found out that I was a Necromancer…Why am I feeling so uncomfortable when he's smiling so brightly…?

“…I didn’t expect to see you again. Well, thinking about it, the Hub is a bit cramped.” Lastly, the woman I met yesterday spoke. I was unsure if her words were tinged with sarcasm or tenderness, and I could do nothing but remain quiet.

At the very least, all three seemed to be acquaintances of Bae Jaemin. Didn’t one of them call Jaemin his guild master? Perhaps all three were part of his new guild…Although I knew how rude my behavior was, I still feigned innocence, anxiously thinking that I might make a misstep.

However, Bae Jaemin continued to smile at me, “If you sold the Barnasiums in bulk, then you must have raided the [Second Company] Dungeon to farm the ingredients. That means you must be a high-level ranker…Are you still saying we wouldn’t have met before?”

He spoke as if high-level rankers have no choice but to be acquainted with him.

Although considering his status, that may be true. I thought desperately about how to turn his questions back onto him; I noticed my trembling hands and held them close.

Seo Dawon, who had been tapping my shoulder like a keyboard, whispered in my ear, “Let’s just say those were from a friend.”

“….They aren’t mine, a friend grabbed them,” I replied, diligently.

“Oh really? Who is your friend?” Bae Jaemin asked.

“Ask him why you’d be selling the goods as an external agent,” Seo Dawon urged.

“…..Why would I be acting as an external agent?”

“You can’t reveal their name?”

I answered not with words but with an awkward laugh. The other three around us adopted an odd expression, but Bae Jaemin continued to smile,

“Do you have other stock you’re selling in bulk? I was also looking for more Barnasiums, and I was sad to hear that it was already sold out.”

“I have no more.”

“You’re not excluding me on purpose, right?”

I hesitated for a moment, unable to gather my words. He had unexpectedly hit the nail on the head.

When he saw my expression, Bae Jaemin laughed in faux pleasantry, “Ah, why are you being so mean to me? Are you sure you won’t give me your number?” He continued in his dogged pursuit, not forgetting his original goal.

“Bae Jaemin, you followed him all the way here just to get his number?” The man with the scar across his face listened to our conversation in disbelief, looking alternatively between me and Bae Jaemin.

“Yes. But as you can see…I keep getting rejected.”

At his statement, I felt a sudden rise in bloodthirst from the green-haired man. Seo Dawon, too, could feel that unhidden hostility. He remarked, “I think Jaemin said all that on purpose. It looks like they’re going to stab you.”

Is that green-haired man Bae Jaemin’s servant or something? What kind of reaction is that when I simply rejected his guild master…

[Clack Clack Clack!!]

The ever-present guardian of my feelings, Lackey, snapped furiously at the hostile man.

Fortunately, the tattooed woman began to vent the chilly atmosphere, “His seller contact ID is available on Market Raid, anyway.”

“Yes. Sales are only conducted through that application.” I said.

However, Bae Jaemin expressed his unwelcome attention until the bitter end. “Then, I hope I’ll receive your personal contact information after we get closer.” He reached into his wallet and took out a white business card.

I really didn’t want to receive it, but I felt that I’d be further forced into an undesirable position if I refused this social gesture. He then handed over another business card–blue this time.

‘What is *this* I thought, but tactfully kept quiet.

“Blue is the [HaHae] guild’s number, and white is my own personal number.”

Seo Dawon snorted behind me.

I simply said, “I….see.” and quickly stuffed the detestable cards in my pocket. Honestly, if I contact the [HaHae] guild, won’t I also be contacting you? What’s the point of giving me two different numbers? Does he just like showboating….?

“If there’s anything you need help with, please let me know. Don’t feel pressured about it though,” Bae Jaemin continued.

After being so clingy, I can’t believe he would dare talk about pressure… Still, I half-heartedly gave my polite greetings, “Yes, yes, thank you~ I’ll be going now,” and ran for the elevator. My back prickled with 4 insistent gazes, but I no longer saw the group from within the elevator.

“Was Bae Jaemin gay?” Seo Dawon murmured as we left the elevator.

I shouted, “Huh? Why? What makes you say that?” I had not realized how loud my voice was until passersby gave me a strange look and a wide berth…

Darn…have I made it so obvious how agitated I was? Fortunately, Seo Dawon chose to ignore my exclamation and pass over the outburst with only a questioning glance. He continued, “He was being so damn cheesy.”

“…..Hmm. I guess? I thought he was just being pretentious….”

“I don’t usually give guys my personal contact number and encourage them to be in contact whenever they need me.”

“Ahh….”

I had thought the same originally….but the person we’re scrutinizing is Bae Jaemin! We had not met under normal circumstances, and I already knew how he had so deeply betrayed the [Red Lotus] guild. Frankly, I felt nothing for him other than fear.

He probably thought he’d find some use for me…

….Seo Dawon placed his arm around my shoulder and leaned in close as if he were spilling some national secret. He whispered, “Hey, you might not know this, but there’s a lot of perverts among the Rankers. You should be careful.”

“What?”

“And, this is just my opinion…Bae Jaemin sees the world from such a different perspective. He’s the type of guy to get excited at stitching tangerine peels back together.”

Even though I was intrigued by the dirty laundry he was airing, I wondered if he was simply gauging how gullible I am. I timidly attacked him, “Aren’t you also a Ranker?” [1]

Seo Dawon shook his eyebrows at an invisible audience, as if to say ‘Are you seeing this?’ He recovered quickly, however, and returned the banter, blow for blow, “Well, I suppose by that standard I’m also a pervert, but…In the end, everyone seems to like that?” He leaned in closer with a sly smile.

Goosebumps raised all over my arms at the sight of his expression, and I quickly escaped from his grasp. “Get off!”

“If our Lee-kyung-ie is curious, then he should just give me an order. I’m your servant, so I’m forced to comply with every demand.” He sighed

dramatically, completing the perfect performance of a beleaguered man.

I shouted, “Why would I ask something like that of you!”

* * *

Eventually, my patience ran out and I screamed out of frustration. Though the crowd looked at me in bewilderment, my agitation dampened whatever embarrassment I would usually feel.

Originally I had planned to buy most of the things I needed on this trip, but because of various events, I was delayed. Precious few hours were left before businesses closed…Besides, I was hungry, so I decided to return home. I could always come back tomorrow for the needed supplies, or order online.

I had thought about eating out, but I wanted to avoid the extra burden of eating while Seo Dawon sat and watched me with nothing better to do. (Though others couldn’t see the man, it’s not as if I could easily ignore his presence.)

On a gas stovetop, I cracked the eggs and scrambled them. Seo Dawon, this jerk, was quite calm while I was cooking, but he immediately grabbed a spoon and a pair of chopsticks as soon as I was finished.

“Can I try some of this?” He asked.

“Can you even eat?”

“I want to try.” Then, he scooped some scrambled eggs into his waiting mouth.

No way…

He can actually eat?

But, soon afterward, he scrunched his face; he spat out the eggs into some tissue paper.

“As expected, no good?”

“It’s so tasteless…”

“Hey!!”

“Just kidding. It’s delicious, but I just can’t seem to swallow. Too bad.”

Still, it seems that he could at least still taste the food…Suddenly I felt sorry for him. I placed a bit of rice and some side dishes [2] in a bowl and put them in front of him.

He looked at the food and smiled bitterly, “So I can only have a taste?”

“I just didn’t feel like eating alone. It’s enough if you pretend to eat.” I purposely added a blunt, “It’s an order.”

Seo Dawon smiled at me and said, “Thank you,” in a rich, clear voice. Like that we enjoyed an odd but warm meal.

Lackey lacked the faculties to swallow as well, but it too pretended to join in on the meal. The skeleton servant was placed by my side, and I handed him small bits of rice wrapped in seaweed. Looking at it chewing so enthusiastically, I felt guilty that I had forced it to [Bite] all the time with no payoff.

I’m sorry, Lackey.

–Ding Dong

Just as we were finishing our meal, the doorbell rang.

I had no acquaintance that would visit me without any notice this late in the night. I approached the door, tense, wondering if it was Bae Jaemin.

Seo Dawon was already two steps ahead of me. He enveloped his hands in a golden glow, ready to shoot skills when necessary.

“Who is it?” Nervously, I stood at the door and called out to the mysterious visitor…

“It’s me, Kim Sangyoon.”

I heard an unexpected voice through the door.

TL: Seo Dawon is such a troll…

Footnotes

1. So, the idiom used here is “Spit onto your face,” which basically means to mock or to say unbelievable things to tease someone
2. Korean side dishes, or banchan, is a must for any meal! It’s common to have 3 – 8 dishes with your meal!

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Chapter 37

Chapter 37

“H-hey, what brings you here?”

Why would Kim Sangyoon visit my house at nearly 10 pm?

I hesitated but eventually opened the garden gate. After all, he was a familiar face. Kim Sangyoon strode onto the front porch, edging towards the door, even though I had not invited him in.

I checked Seo Dawon’s slight frown out of the corner of my eyes, and I sneakily blocked Kim Sangyoon’s path.

“Um, Sangyoon-nim…Is there a reason why you’ve come so late at night?” I asked, “I’m a bit flustered…”

“Can we speak inside?”

“That’s…It’s a bit late now, can’t this wait until next time? Why all of a sudden….”

“Oho. Is there someone inside? Someone you can’t introduce me to?”

“……Huh?”

What on earth is he talking about?

Puzzlingly, Kim Sangyoon smiled widely as if he had caught me by the tail. Seo Dawon, standing next to me, looked him up and down. “Is he drunk?” He asked.

All joking matters aside, I think I smelled the faint scent of alcohol off his body. Perplexed, I held onto Kim Sangyoon's arm. I don't know why he's acting like some ex-boyfriend, drinking and barging into another's house, but I felt as if I shouldn't allow him inside.

However, Kim Sangyoon snatched my wrist the moment I laid my hand on his arm. I twisted, trying to get away. "W-What are you doing?" I cried. However, against a Warrior–a class that boasted superior strength–my struggles were in vain.

Seo Dawon immediately began to walk closer as soon as he saw the scene.

However, just before Dawon grabbed at Kim Sangyoon's shoulder, the Warrior spoke to me in a low tone, "You met with Bae Jaemin at the <Tower of Command>, didn't you?"

……What?

My eyes opened wide, unable to hide how shaken I was.

My expression must have confirmed something for Kim Sangyoon; He began murmuring, "I knew it…I knew something was weird. A dungeon where two level 60 Users died, I should have known something was wrong when someone like you survived…"

I couldn't even begin to explain myself–I had no idea how Kim Sangyoon found out….or what exactly he knew.

However, Kim Sangyoon's temper flared at my silence. "Aren't you going to say something?" Perhaps he thought I was ignoring him.

"N-no, I've never met him."

I had no choice but to deny everything, but Kim Sangyoon didn't seem to believe any of my words.

How on earth did he find out?

However, Kim Sangyoon began to accuse me of something quite strange.

“You’re going to feign ignorance now? You thought I wouldn’t find out that you, after receiving Bae Jaemin’s support, messed up the raid on purpose? Getting caught in the lake and dragging your feet…Dragging us to the trap room for some supposed ‘ingredient’…After wasting our time, Ahn Joosung defeated the Lich Lord!”

It was hard to even understand his words. In the first place, I had no idea who Ahn Joosung was–I knew neither his face nor his class.

So, I asked him, “Who is this Ahn Joosung?”

Kim Sangyoon, flushed with frustration, stood intimidatingly in front of me, invading my personal space with his large stature. He threateningly growled, “You don’t know Ahn Joosung? Bae Jaemin? How many beatings will you need until you remember?”

“No matter how stubbornly you repeat yourself, I….”

“Then what do you say to this? A Necromancer who hadn’t even reached level 50 returns from the Dungeon and begins to sell dozens of the highest grade Barnasiums. And today, earlier in the day, you exchanged business cards with Bae Jaemin at the department store. There’s photographic evidence of this scene; plenty of people saw it!”

“……..”

This….crazy….!

Did Kim Sangyoon misunderstand all because of **that**?

I hurriedly stated, “The Barnasiums were given to me by a friend–I was a third-party seller.”

By that time, he had already grabbed me by the collar and lifted me into the air. “Bastard, I already know that ‘friend’ is Bae Jaemin.”

“Cough, cough…..!”

“I knew something was suspicious about you and your accident–how you survived so long on your own. Hey, call Bae Jaemin right away or I’ll….”

However, Kim Sangyoon did not finish his sentence.

He stood there with his eyes open wide, as if he had been electrocuted. His amazing grip force, which had been squeezing my collar, had suddenly slackened, and his body began trembling all over.

I stepped away quickly, catching my breath. When I looked up, Seo Dawon was behind him, lightly gripping and bending Kim Sangyoon’s neck. The touch wasn’t normal; something gold twinkled on Dawon’s fingertips. Furthermore, Kim Sangyoon continued to convulse and started to foam at the mouth.

The crotch of his jeans also began to darken–he had wet himself from the force of Seo Dawon’s mysterious skill.

Is Dawon…planning to kill him?

I couldn’t stop gaping at the scene. As soon as our eyes met, Seo Dawon gently released his hand and lightly flicked some invisible dirt off his skin, as if he had touched something filthy.

After he was released, Kim Sangyoon could not keep his balance and crashed on the floor, limbs writhing in agony.

Seo Dawon did not even blink at the violence and blandly recited a spell, “Aqua.”

Water, enough to fill a bucket, blinked into existence in the air above the Warrior. From there, it relentlessly sprinkled over his prone body.

Kim Sangyoon did not return to his senses with that first deluge. However, when Aqua was repeated multiple times, his upturned eyes

returned to their normal position. He seemed to have regained consciousness, though his body temporarily lost mobility due to shock.

Seo Dawon kicked Kim Sangyoon's listless body and looked at me. He said, softly, "Lee-kyung-ah, call my name."

"……Huh?"

"Focus your will, and, with the intention to "summon" me into reality, call for me."

Would you like to manifest your servant, 'Seo Dawon'?

As he talked, an opaque message appeared. I was confused, but I called his name as he desired. "Seo Dawon."

The moment I called his name, a strange feeling washed over me. It felt as if the surrounding colors became desaturated–the scenery awash with a strange lighting.

I looked up at the sky casually, trying to locate the origin of the disharmony. Just a moment ago, the moon was bright and yellow, shining softly onto the front garden; now it glowed an unnatural brilliant vermillion.

An unnatural stillness followed.

The chirping of grasshoppers, usually present at all hours, was silenced.

"S-Save me!!"

You've succeeded in triggering the status effect 'Fear'.

Charisma increased (+10).

We hadn't even tortured Kim Sangyoon after Seo Dawon's first attack, but he suddenly started crying and begging.

His reaction reminded me of one of the Necromancer class skills, [Fear]. Seo Dawon stepped on Kim Sangyoon's head, and the Warrior could only

grab onto his shoe, pleading for mercy.

“I’m sorry, I’ve done wrong. I’m so sorry…..Ugh…..”

“I want to ask you something.” Seo Dawon ignored my shell-shocked expression and acted on his own. His unusually sharp voice cut through the tense air.

“Yes, yes…I’m listening” Kim Sangyoon replied through his tears.

“The man that Bae Jaemin is pushing. Ahn Joosung. I’d like to hear about their relationship.” Seo Dawon’s voice was calm, but I couldn’t help but shudder. The contrast between his voice and the blazing focus in his eyes made the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

Kim Sangyoon bashed his head onto the ground. “Yes! Yes, just ask me anything!” He responded, pleased to be able to help. He seemed to have instinctively understood that his life and death lay in the palm of Seo Dawon’s hands.

“Why do you think Bae Jaemin is supporting this Ahn Joosung?”

“W-Well, Ahn Joosung…..knnngh!”

When Kim Sangyoon tried to raise his head to respond, Seo Dawon kicked his face without any mercy, preventing his face from being exposed to the pitiful Warrior.

“Don’t look up. You don’t need to see me to answer my questions.”

“Mmrgh…..Yes…..yes….”

“Well then. Where were we? Ahn Joosung?”

“Yes…Ah, Ahn Joosung…He’s the grandson of Chairman Ahn of the Shin Shin group. T-that’s why Bae Jaemin to Ahn Joosung…He’s a special contact. Whether it’s carrying him through Dungeons or bringing him to unthinkably difficult places…He’s poured a lot of effort into raising Ahn

Joosung…” Bowing his head to the floor, Kim Sangyoon began to air all the grievances he had towards the man.

While listening to his story, Seo Dawon tapped his chin and murmured to himself, “Hmm, blatantly favoring someone born with a gold spoon in his mouth would sow some discord.”

“….Yes, yes. T-that’s why people…Often the raids become twisted or ruined because of Ahn Joosung…There’s a lot of discontent among the Users who know about it.”

“So, guys like you, who can’t squeeze into their party, have some complaints about it, huh?”

“Yes.” Kim Sangyoon winced at the blunt words but eventually nodded. For a man who was so eager to believe that I had colluded with Bae Jaemin, he quieted so easily under Seo Dawon’s foot. Cold sweat ran down my back–was he jealous?

Kim Sangyoon continued to add to his tale, eyes tightly squeezed shut. “But….T-there’s a lot of complaints within HaHae as well…Since Ahn Joosung is low level and is unskilled…yet he’s treated like a guild master…”

“You’re talking about the HaHae guild?”

“Yes….”

“Didn’t they just form yesterday?”

“The official announcement was yesterday…Unofficially, they’ve been a guild for many years already. They’ve been calling themselves HaHae for a long while now.”

“When did that start?”

“I don’t know…Maybe…Around two years ago, there were a lot of rumors about them.”

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Chapter 38

Chapter 38

Two years ago…That's a year after the fall of the [Red Lotus] guild.

When they asked Seo Dawon to join, it was still a secretive organization…Various theories crossed my mind. Perhaps HaHae had grown so big such that they could no longer hide its existence? Or, perhaps, they grew bold and revealed themselves after the death of their rival?

Moreover, if what Kim Sangyoon said was true–if Bae Jaemin was supporting Ahn Joosung and was protected by Chairman Ahn–then the HaHae guild already had clutched a heavy purse. The Shin Shin Group was one of the top five conglomerates in Korea.

Even when I didn't fully know the enemy's true identity, I had never thought that revenge would be easy. But, as the reality of the situation was slowly uncovered, a hopeless feeling emerged within me.

Honestly, fulfilling the goal was already a long way off…Now a conglomerate was also implicated in this conspiracy?

However, Seo Dawon did not outwardly react and simply asked him another question. "Then, why aren't you lining up to fawn over Bae Jaemin?"

Kim Sangyoon bit his lips at Seo Dawon's blunt question.

Judging from his distorted expression, there was more to the story.

“Actually, I tried to work underneath him….”

“Yeah?”

“And I got rejected…..”

“Bae Jaemin turned you down himself?”

‘’Yeah….”

“Did you say something wrong?”

“It’s nothing like that. When I said I wanted to join HaHae…He told me that he didn’t think I was a good fit for the guild….” Kim Sangyoon clenched his fist.

Seo Dawon looked down at him and smiled. “I think you know why he said that, don’t you?” He provoked.

Kim Sangyoon did not deny the accusation. After a brief moment of silence, he spoke with a trembling voice, “…It’s because of Ahn Joosung. Our classes overlap. That’s why he hates me.”

“He hates you just because he’s also a Warrior?”

“It’s a bit embarrassing to say this, but…He can’t stand anyone who’s a better Warrior than he is. He despises those that take attention away from him.”

It seems he was a bit ashamed to toot his own horn while being completely overpowered by Seo Dawon. However, judging by his gritted teeth, it seems like he wasn’t spouting nonsense.

Should I say that I felt within him a wave of anger unique to those that have suffered at the hands of many fools?

Seo Dawon cut his rambling short and asked another question. “But you’ve been in touch with Ahn Joosung during the <Tower of Command> raid, haven’t you?”

That’s right. I think Kim Sangyoon was angry that Ahn Joosung didn’t inform him of something and betrayed him.

“…Ahn Joosung may hate me, but I’m not in the position to readily show my mutual hatred.” Kim Sangyoon answered, calmly. “He promised to inform us before he defeated the final boss, so we could join the battle and split the rewards.”

“…..”

“But…I guess he had no intention of honoring his promise. I guess I was a fool to believe him.”

To reiterate…

Kim Sangyoon knew that Ahn Joosung didn’t like him, but he endured the abuse to mooch from his status…In the end, he ended up with nothing but water while Ahn Joosung took the entire feast at the <Tower of Command> raid.

Coincidentally, I, who was in his party, suddenly made large amounts of money selling Barnasiums and exchanged business cards with Bae Jaemin, who was well known as Ahn Joosung’s partner…Wow. Even I would think the whole situation looked fishy.

When Sangyoon’s story finished, Seo Dawon roughly grabbed at his hair and lifted him. Kim Sangyoon trembled with fear and closed his eyes, trying not to look at his assailant.

Laughing at his pitiful appearance, Seo Dawon said, “I thought I would gouge out your eyes if you looked at me…how quick-witted of you.”

“Please…..”

“Do you want to live?”

Kim Sangyoon nodded like crazy, even though his hair was locked in Seo Dawon’s grasp. The desperation in his face turned my stomach, and I

found it hard to continue to observe any more of this one-sided interrogation.

However, Seo Dawon's eyes became colder as Kim Sangyoon acted more servile. "You know…what you said was damn funny."

"……What?"

"If you're telling the truth, then you should have threatened Ahn Joosung, your betrayer, or Bae Jaemin, his direct supporter. Why would you try to beat our cute Lee-kyung-ie, hmm? After drinking, too."

Hearing him call me cute, I thought Seo Dawon was joking. Surprisingly, though, his expression was devoid of all amusement. I could feel the bloodthirst rolling off of him, chilling my spine.

"What I found most disgusting is that, after drinking, you made the conscious decision to visit Choi Lee-kyung's house. Why did you come here? You wanted to beat him into a bloody rice cake, didn't you?" [1]

"N-no. I just wanted to talk…."

"I see people these days call holding someone up by their collar, 'talking'"

–Slap!

Seo Dawon struck Kim Sangyoon across his cheek.

The blow was intense enough to turn his entire head. Even after being slapped, Kim Sangyoon did not open his eyes. Seo Dawon warned him, "Don't talk nonsense to me. After being left with nothing so many times by Bae Jaemin and Ahn Joosung, you went to drink out of frustration. There's no way you could have vented your frustrations onto them–you would have been crushed. While you were out, someone must have spread the rumor

about Bae Jaemin and Lee-kyung exchanging business cards. They probably also talked about the Barnasiums there as well.”

“…..”

“So you’re here to sate your anger–you’re here because you got provoked…Well, tell me if I’m right. You’re here to soothe your bruised pride. Don’t you think so?”

“….”

“Why can’t you stand Bae Jaemin or Ahn Juseong picking on you? After all, you’re here to pick on someone weaker than you. Bastard, you’re the same as them.”

For a moment, I thought Seo Dawon’s words were too heavy-handed–too harsh…Complex emotions welled up inside of me. The uncomfortable shame of weakness…a feeling of relief…One after the other the two blended in my conflicted heart.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry……” Kim Sangyoon began to beg with both his hands clasped together.

Seo Dawon let him go, laughing, “Where are you directing that apology?”

Sangyoon opened his eyes very carefully, quickly turned his back on Seo Dawon, and crawled to me on his knees. “I’m so sorry! So Sorry!”

I wasn’t happy that he looked so broken; I wasn’t sure I could forgive him and send him back in this state. I hesitated, unable to do this or that.

Behind Kim Sangyoon’s back, Seo Dawon gestured with his hands, as if he could perceive my concerns. He started moving his fingers as if he typing into the air.

Seo Dawon: I think this guy might come in handy.

Seo Dawon: Let’s make a living servant, kek

As expected, he was sending a message through the system.

Contrary to what he wrote, however, Seo Dawon insisted on killing Kim Sangyoon with a vicious tone.

“Lee-kyung-ah, what should we do? Should I kill him?”

“Wuuu…” Kim Sangyoon whimpered.

“I recommend quickly killing him, to divert any future troubles.”

“I-I have a trusty mouth! Lee-kyung-nim! Please….” [2]“

Seo Dawon: Reverse psychology, lolol

I looked between Kim Sangyoon’s frightened expression, Seo Dawon’s expectant, grinning face, and the system message that anticipated far too much from me.

He probably wanted me to play the good cop to his threatening bad cop, saving Kim Sangyoon’s life with kindness…

I shook my head and spoke in an awkward tone, “Let’s. see. No. matter. how. much. wrong. he’s. done. killing. someone. is. way. too. overboard….”

“L-Lee-kyung-nim….!”

Seo Dawon: Idiot, lolololololol

Seo Dawon: What’s with your acting?

I’ve never done anything like this before, so I sounded as if I was reading off some script.

Seo Dawon hadn’t even given me an advance warning–I got frustrated at his shoulders shaking with silent laughter. “Shut up!” I said.

Fortunately, Kim Sangyoon was far too scared to notice our suspicious behavior. He clung to my feet, “I-If you’d just spare me, I’ll do anything. Lee-kyung-nim, please…..!”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: That feel when MC is horrible at improv.

Footnotes

1. = Blood (rice) cake. Essentially a lump of blood and flesh…It's what happens when you beat someone into an unrecognizable lump.
2. The original word used for trusty is , which means heavy. It's the counterpart to a light mouth, used for those that gossip frequently. Heavy mouths, therefore, keep secrets.

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Chapter 39

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Seo Dawon passed Kim Sangyoon, who was still bent in half on the floor and stood by my side. As his footsteps neared, Kim Sangyoon's breath caught in his throat; when Seo Dawon stood in front with me, Sangyoon could no longer dare raise his head.

As for Seo Dawon….He seemed to be enjoying Sangyoon's reaction. His face was the most delighted I had ever seen it.

How wicked…

However, it was evident that his wickedness was effective; whatever I would say would have great effect. I sighed and called out to the trembling shell of a man. "Sangyoon-nim."

"…..Yes."

"First….I'd like to clear up a misunderstanding."

"……."

Kim Sangyoon still clung to the floor, but I knew he was listening. I didn't stop for an answer and continued, "I'm not close with Bae Jaemin. The Barnasiums had nothing to do with him. Those Barnasiums I sold….belonged to this guy here. He's my…."

Then, I considered how to explain my relationship with this man. "….Friend. That's why I lent him my name," I said, awkwardly. However,

Seo Dawon didn’t seem to object and remained silent.

After a pause, Kim Sangyoon finally responded, “Yeah…”

“And this guy,” I pointed towards Seo Dawon, “He’s on REALLY bad terms with Bae Jaemin. Same with me. Enough to kill him, actually.”

Since Kim Sangyoon had his forehead plastered to the floor, I couldn’t read his expression. However, when I mentioned ‘killing,’ Bae Jaemin, he flinched and stopped breathing for a moment. As intended, he took my words seriously.

However, the harsh words killed his courage to respond. I continued to speak, despite the tense atmosphere. “And Sangyoon-nim…You already know, right? There’s no use trying to flatter Bae Jaemin while Ahn Joosung exists. The two already act as if they are two halves of one body.”

“……”

“Bae Jaemin won’t care for anyone who has less than Ahn Joosung and his golden spoon. No matter how hard you crumple your pride, Sangyoon-nim, Bae Jaemin won’t ever pay attention to you.”

Kim Sangyoon was still silent.

Though, when Seo Dawon whispered, “Honestly, you already figured that out, haven’t you?” Sangyoon nodded softly. To some extent, our persuasions had some effect on the man.

I spoke again with a little more confidence, “Ahn Joosung is living quite nicely thanks to Bae Jaemin, right? You may have talent, but talent is worth half of money and connections. Sangyoon-nim may be one of the most famous Warriors now, but what about 1 or 2 years later?”

I blurted out whatever complaints that I thought he may have, drawing all sorts of conclusions from his brief conversation with Seo Dawon.

As a fan who regularly watched Kim Sangyoon’s streams, I knew how much pride he took in his ability.

And since he was a User that was on the verge of breaking into the Ranker lists, he was sensitive to every small detail of raids. After venturing into a Dungeon with him and his party, I could guess how much he detested losing everything to someone like Ahn Joosung.

In addition, he was well known for relentlessly picking fights with Users who compare him to others in livestream chats. In particular, if the compared party was a Warrior, he would be in a bad mood for the entirety of the stream. Long-time fans have learned to refrain from making jokes that would provoke Kim Sangyoon's sensitive nature….

It occurred to me that a man with such pride could not stand someone like Ahn Joosung, who masked his incompetence with his social status.

Kim Sangyoon must hate Ahn Joosung as much as the latter hates him.

Additionally, Kim Sangyoon was obviously afraid of the man as much as he hated him. More than his overwhelming background, Kim Sangyoon was struck with the foreboding premonition that someday Ahn Joosung would overtake him through the sheer brunt force of his resources.

He was driven to ridiculous acts such as breaking into another's home in this anxious state of mind, pressured by the helplessness of his situation.

"……" Kim Sangyoon did not confirm nor deny anything after I quieted down.

But his thick hands shook, tearing and grasping at the garden lawn. Seo Dawon and I waited for him in silence, waiting for his tremors to pass.

Shortly afterward, Kim Sangyoon said with a hoarse voice, "…Will you also kill Ahn Joosung?"

"Yes."

"….Do you have a way to kill them without incurring consequences?"

Good.

Kim Sangyoon had been completely tempted through our manipulations. Seo Dawon and I exchanged meaningful glances.

“Raise your head.” Seo Dawon ordered.

The Warrior flinched but slowly raised his head like an obedient dog. When I looked into his eyes, it looked as if Kim Sangyoon aged 10 years during the interrogation.

He then carefully turned towards Seo Dawon. The ghostly Mage’s face was scrutinized, every inch and pore; Kim Sangyoon gasped in astonishment, “S-Seo Dawon….!”

Seo Dawon smiled at the Warrior, who was frozen in disbelief. “Now you know why we want to kill Bae Jaemin.”

“This is ridiculous…! Ah, Then…Don’t tell me, at the Tower of Command….?!”

“Well, we can talk about that kind of thing gradually.” Seo Dawon cut off Kim Sangyoon’s rambles and sent Kim Sangyoon a [vow of submission].

A red parchment-shaped system message floated over to Kim Sangyoon and unfurled before his eyes. Kim Sangyoon began to read the contract with a confused expression, “Vow of submission….?”

“I’ve set some ground rules that our party must follow. Read it out loud.” Seo Dawon said.

“….One. I, Kim Sangyoon, will obey Choi Lee-kyung’s order for the foreseeable future and must actively cooperate in his plans….”

After reading the first rule, Kim Sangyoon glanced at Seo Dawon with a reluctant and vague expression. At the force of the Mage’s glare, he flinched and turned back to the parchment. “Two. I, Kim Sangyoon, will not tell anyone about this contract. Three. In return, I, Kim Sangyoon, will be protected by Choi Lee-kyung…..?”

“You get the gist, right? Then sign your consent underneath your name.” Seo Dawon spoke as if the contract was fair and ordinary; Kim Sangyoon bit his lips but eventually raised his finger.

While hesitantly writing, letter by letter, he asked, “Did all the other Red Lotus guild members survive as well?”

Neither Seo Dawon nor I deigned to give him a response. He eventually yielded to our stubborn reticence and said, “I’m done….”

‘Vow of Submission’ is now in effect.

You’ve subdued your opponent through force and made him agree to a humiliating contract! The influence of evil has grown within, resulting in an increase to dark or curse attribute attacks by +0.1%.

An uncomfortable message popped up as soon as Kim Sangyoon signed the parchment. The signed contract returned to my hand and disappeared into the system space.

Because Necromancers are evil in nature, will doing horrid things like this benefit me…? This train of thought was rudely interrupted by an alarm.

Servant ‘Seo Dawon’s’ summon duration period has ended. There’s a 23:59:59 second cooldown before he can be resummoned.

The surroundings suddenly brightened; the moon in the sky returned to its ordinary yellowish hue. The gloomy atmosphere had changed completely.

While I could still see Seo Dawon, Kim Sangyoon had lost sight of him. “Huh? Seo Dawon-nim…Where did he go?” He asked, with a visibly perplexed expression.

“It seems the max time we have is just 30 minutes.” Seo Dawon said, mouth set in a grim line. He seemed to be calculating something.

I looked back at Kim Sangyoon awkwardly, “Please wait a moment. There’s something I need to do…”

Turning away from the warrior, I returned my attention back to Seo Dawon’s mumbles. “I’m glad we finished the interrogation before the summoning ended. Let’s go to the Dungeons with Kim Sangyoon tomorrow.”

“……Hm……” I agonized to find the proper answer to his comment and to the strange ways events unfolded this evening.

For now, I decided to address Kim Sangyoon, who continued to tremble in my yard with a slack face. I felt guilty as I looked upon his pale, large, and sweaty body, alongside the piss stain on his pants. Though it was all Seo Dawon’s doing…somehow I also felt at fault.

“Excuse me…For now, why don’t you dry your clothes inside?” I asked.

“Ahh…Yes.” Finally aware of his own shameful appearance, Kim Sangyoon flushed a bright red and followed behind me.

Seo Dawon, the instigator for this entire mess, complained, “You’re actually allowing a guy like that into *our* house?”

TL: MC – *wondering what to call Seo Dawon*…..He’s a “friend”
(Tbf, any other explanation would bring raised eyebrows no matter what he said)

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Chapter 40

Chapter 40

Kim Sangyoon bathed himself and, with an awkward expression, walked out of the bathroom.

I didn't have any clothes that would fit him in my quarters, and I was worried he'd be left in an embarrassing situation after washing up… Fortunately, though, he carried extra pants in his inventory.

I was surprised at the sight of his bare torso.

Shoulders and abs…the body underneath his clothes was made of tightly knit muscles. When he was clothed he looked so fat…Honestly, he should just walk around naked. His outstanding body made me have such ridiculous thoughts. I now understood why he insistently protested when his viewers called him a pig.

Just…Why would you go around wearing those kinds of clothes? If you wear something like what a real gangster would wear…. [1]

"Achoo!" Kim Sangyoon sneezed.

"….Excuse me for one moment."

"Yes…."

Kim Sangyoon's sneeze jolted me out of my thoughts. My admiration faded as I remembered how he was overpowered by Seo Dawon.

If those muscles couldn’t move an inch against one measly skill, then there must be a limit to physical strength. As expected, Mage is such a god-level class.

When I went to the kitchen to grab warm water for Kim Sangyoon, I made eye contact with Seo Dawon, who had been watching me for a while.

He scrunched his face as if he had some complaints to make…?

He continued to stare at me, without a word–I wondered if his mood had soured. Since Kim Sangyoon was still waiting inside the house, I simply passed by Dawon and went back to the sofa. Kim Sangyoon sat blankly, lost in thought, as I approached; he received the cup I handed over and accepted it graciously.

“Take it. It’s warm water.”

“…..Yes. Thank you so much.”

The Kim Sangyoon I knew had carried confidence within his arrogant voice…Maybe because of his sagging red hair? He looked so dejected–like a different person.

“Umm…..”

“So……”

Trying to break the awkward silence, the two of us began to speak simultaneously.

I yielded, motioning him to speak first.

However, Kim Sangyoon, flustered, bowed his head politely, “No. Please, after you.”

Is this the same Kim Sangyoon who sat cross-legged at a cafe and spoke to me in an informal manner….? Inwardly, I was shocked by the sudden change in attitude, but I stopped myself from indicating any such surprise

on the outside. “As fast as possible…I need to level up. I would like it if you could help us out…”

“We can start immediately. Tomorrow?”

“R-Really?”

“Yes.” Kim Sangyoon fiddled with the towel around his neck before looking up at me. “It would be good to organize a party, but…..For now, we should move alone, right?”

“Umm…..”

“Yeah. Tell him we’ll move as three.” Seo Dawon said.

When did he get here anyway?

“…Yes. It would be better to keep it to just us three for now.” I said, parroting my ghostly servant.

After hearing my answer, Kim Sangyoon nodded. “Then, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Then, he hesitated for a while and cautiously asked, “But… Could I ask one more question?”

“What is it?”

“Seo Dawon-nim…How did this happen?”

This must all be so confusing from Kim Sangyoon’s point of view: Seo Dawon, who should have been dead for three years now, had suddenly appeared in front of him. I looked towards Seo Dawon asking with a silent look, ‘What do you want to do?’

He shook his head.

Well…I guess it is too early to tell Kim Sangyoon everything.

In the end, I responded vaguely, “That’s….something you should ask Seo Dawon directly.”

Kim Sangyoon closed his mouth though I knew he must have had further questions. Perhaps he saw my reluctance in my eyes and knew he would get no straight answers.

Cutting through the tense atmosphere, Seo Dawon asked me, “What’s his level?”

“Sangyoon-nim, what’s your level?” I asked.

He replied, “I’m level 71.”

“Ahhh…..”

“Level 71 and still that’s the best he can do?” Seo Dawon scoffed.

“……”

“Hmmm, I guess Warriors are a bit ignorant.”

I pretended to be deaf to Seo Dawon’s scathing criticisms.

Kim Sangyoon continued, “I’ve risen to level 71, but…..lately I feel like that’s a bit lacking….”

Surprisingly, it seemed as if he was answering Seo Dawon’s unheard question. Seo Dawon looked him up and down and told me, “Ask what main skills he uses.”

“Um, so…What kind of skills do you mainly use?” I complied.

“Me?”

“Yes….”

“‘Chest Slash’ connected to Berserker, and ‘Rending Cleave’.”

“He only has two main skills at that level? What about proficiency?” Dawon said.

"……How proficient are those skills?"

"They're both superior grades." Kim Sangyoon answered.

"We're doomed….."

"We're doo–…..I mean, Hmmm….." I stopped myself from repeating Seo Dawon's unenthusiastic complaints.

"What?"

I chose to ignore Kim Sangyoon's confusion and instead looked towards Seo Dawon. He tapped his chin and muttered, "I'm curious how he even reached level 71." Once again, he ran his finger along some invisible line in the void to access his spatial distortion and took out an old leather book.

When the book suddenly dropped from midair, Kim Sangyoon scrambled to his feet in surprise. The book rolled to a stop right in front of the Warrior. Seo Dawon pushed me to action, "Pretend it's from you."

I was clueless, but I had no choice but to comply with a frozen smile, "This. Is. For. You."

"T-this is…" Kim Sangyoon grabbed the book after he received my permission.

I think Seo Dawon must have given him a skill book. When the Warrior grasped at its pages, the book glittered blue and disappeared before our eyes. A bright exclamation mark that denotes a new skill acquisition floated on top of his head for a second before gradually scattering into many particles.

When learning a skill for the first time, usually through books, the User would be shown a description of the skill and, if lucky, a short video clip showcasing its use. Thus, those who newly acquired a skill are likely to focus on the explanation, unwilling to look around.

So, in the meantime, I sent Seo Dawon a message.

Choi Lee-kyung: What did you give him?

Seo Dawon: A skill I stole from a Warrior I killed in the past, lolol

Choi Lee-kyung: Gah…

Setting aside how he obtained that skill…Even the most inexpensive of skills would cost ten million won or more… Furthermore, if Seo Dawon was hoarding that skill, wouldn't it be extremely useful?

He's just handing something like that over?

I looked at him for a moment, wondering if he was replaced by a body double.

However, Seo Dawon's next words made me retract my doubt. "If with this skill there's still no answer to his uselessness, you'd be better off killing him and using him as a zombie."

Kim Sangyoon, unaware of his dangerous situation, unfroze and stared at me with a deeply moved, reverent expression. Perhaps he thought I had given him a high-quality skill as a favor after listening to his concerns about his inadequacy…

Ah. The gleam in his eyes is too burdensome.

"H-how could I p-possibly repay this favor…."

"…..It's nothing." I didn't give it to you, and I don't think Seo Dawon gave you this skill with good intentions either. I was extremely embarrassed to receive his fervent gratitude.

Kim Sangyoon continued to thank me, bowing his head countless times.

At this point, I had wondered what on earth was contained in that skill book for him to grovel so obsequiously. Of course, I couldn't ask Kim Sangyoon when I was supposed to be playing the role of benefactor.

"I will definitely master the skill you have given me within a month!" Kim Sangyoon clenched his fist and swore, determination burning brightly.

I had no choice but to offer vague noises of approval. However, Kim Sangyoon didn't seem to have noticed the oddness in my behavior. He simply lifted his bloodshot eyes and wiped them with his arms. "I'm so sorry."

Kim Sangyoon…This person wasn't the type to be so sincere. For him to be so overwhelmed with gratitude, the skill must have been quite rare?

So, while patting the tearful man on the back, I shot Seo Dawon a questioning look.

Seo Dawon deduced my unspoken questions. "Are you asking what I gave him?" He smiled when I nodded.

"That's Lim Jisoo's brother's skill. [Buster Blade]."

Footnotes

1. This is talking about, ofc, the open shirt style that street gangs would wear that would show off all them abs

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Chapter 41

Chapter 41

What did he just say….?

At the unexpected bombshell, I paused patting Kim Sangyoon's back and turned to look at him.

However, Seo Dawon simply shrugged his shoulders and said, "It's okay. Lim Jisoo probably doesn't even know her brother's dead." His words were probably meant to be reassuring…

….But, far from being reassured, I only became more confused.

"Let's just start with getting Kim Sangyoon situated. I'll tell you more after you send him back to his house." Seo Dawon refused to expand on it further.

Eventually, I managed to regain composure. "Hey… So, I'll contact you in front of the Dungeons tomorrow. And, for the time being, don't tell anyone else about the contract or Seo Dawon."

Kim Sangyoon wiped his tears and nodded. "I won't reveal anything even if Bae Jaemin tortures me!" The addition of such useless, solemn oaths was a bit burdensome, but I was not so coldhearted as to reject any of his fervor.

"That probably won't happen…." I said, returning him to his own quarters.

"Let's speak now." I confronted Seo Dawon as soon as I saw Kim Sangyoon off. Though he languished on the sofa, leaning comfortably

against a few cushions, his expression wasn't peaceful, as if he was recalling a particularly bad memory.

"Lim Jisoo only has one family member: her younger brother…His name was Lim Jiho, a Warrior. I don't exactly know what the relationship between the two was like, but she introduced him to outsiders as her younger brother…The relationship couldn't have been bad."

"So, because you killed her brother, Lim Jisoo…."

"I already said she knows nothing about it. If she knew, would she have let me die so easily?"

Certainly, when I recalled Seo Dawon's memory, Lim Jisoo's attitude did not seem to harbor any resentment, a hatred brought about by the death of a loved one. Rather, I could only feel a sense of relief and joy from her, as if she had finally eliminated a detested rival. She was underhanded but not desperate.

How the hell did he kill her brother without leaving behind any trace?

Furthermore, why did he kill him….?

"How did you end up killing Lim Jiho?"

"There were a few Users who suddenly went missing from Lim Jiho's guild. Since most family members can't access the Hub… After losing contact, those families sent me a request. We agreed to intervene after collecting what seemed to be reliable evidence. Ragi and I conducted a behind-the-scenes investigation into Lim Jiho."

"Then….."

"We launched an investigation against Lim Jiho because he purchased a large number of drugs from alchemists through illegal routes. And, with shallow research, there were already a lot of ugly rumors about him. On record, he had even served time for sexually assaulting his lover before he became a User."

Then….Don’t tell me…

Seo Dawon nodded slightly at my distorted expression.

“It took about a month, but we managed to find our way to the quiet accommodations Lim Jiho carved for himself in the outskirts of the Hub… By the time we arrived, they were all already dead.”

“……”

“That’s where we ran into Lim Jiho.” Although Seo Dawon did not describe the conflict in detail…I could read between the lines, Lim Jiho did something worthy of death.

To this day, no logical rule has been discovered on pinpointing the conditions needed to become a User. 70-year old elders and 5-year old children alike, when they are judged suitable, each and every one of them can access superhuman powers from the moment a system finishes transferring to their consciousness.

Even scum, if they’re lucky, can also obtain these superpowers. If a person like Lim Jiho became a User…They would only gain access to more tools to support their depravity. His personality would not have suddenly changed for the better…

Seo Dawon continued to explain how Lim Jiho’s death was concealed. “At the request of the client, we handed over Lim Jiho’s corpse. And, following their idea, we stole Lim Jiho’s name and withdrew money from his bank account and his guild.”

“Then…You disguised the death by making it seem as if Lim Jiho ran away on his own?”

“That’s right. I don’t know if Lim Jisoo is still being fooled by our trickery…If I haven’t heard anything about it half a year after we handed over the body, I think we’ve covered our tracks pretty well. Besides, I’ve also heard that Lim Jisoo still angrily breathes fire when someone mentions Lim Jiho in her vicinity…”

“Ah….”

Seo Dawon calmly said, “After we killed Lim Jiho, a rare skill appeared, like a reward dropping from a monster. No one could utilize it in Red Lotus, and there was a high chance Lim Jisoo would recognize the skill if I were to sell it. So, I just kept it.”

I suddenly felt like an old woman after hearing such a grim story. “….Can Kim Sangyoon really use this skill?”

“Since he’ll be running Dungeons alone with us, there shouldn’t be any rumors. Later on, we can use Kim Sangyoon as bait for Lim Jisoo; the Warrior can be used in various ways.”

It seems as if Seo Dawon had already created a plan to trap Lim Jisoo. I considered asking if the plan included killing Kim Sangyoon, but I couldn’t vocalize my question. I was a little scared to hear the answer.

My silence seemed to broadcast some complicated feelings to Seo Dawon. He suddenly looked at me and called out to me softly, “Why don’t you sit next to me?” When I hesitated, he added, “Hmm? Do you feel uneasy?”

It was hard to deny his accusations.

I sat obediently next to him and responded, “Don’t say it like that. I don’t feel uneasy at all.”

“Yeah. You should get used to this.” He said in an impudent tone, as if he was purposefully provoking me.

I knew what he had meant by ‘getting used to this.’ I wanted to agree without hesitation, but I couldn’t. Instead, I asked a rather stupid question. “You…Did you kill a lot of people before you died?”

Seo Dawon vaguely hummed, “Umm….” and averted his eyes. He seemed to be seriously considering the question.

After about a minute, I finally stopped his wandering thoughts. “It’s fine….”

“It’s fine?”

“Just tell me this.”

“What?”

“You didn’t kill people according to your mood….right?”

“Hey. Of course not.”

But that means he must have killed for benefit and his own interests.

Of course, during the contract period, there would be no reason to kill me…But what will happen when the contract ends and he’s free from my control? Such worries flooded my mind.

Seo Dawon, as if he read my mind, said, “I’m your servant.” Servant… what a magical word that brings both anxiety and relief. Seo Dawon had the gall to complain, muttering under his breath, “Hey, I *_did_* kill a few people, but….that doesn’t mean you should be so wary of me.”

“Can’t you hear how unbelievable your own words are?”

“Have I ever done anything to you that could justify your fears?” Seo Dawon leaned his head on my shoulder, “I’m disappointed.”

His head was too heavy, and the situation was too awkward; I wanted to escape. But, after hearing that he was disappointed, I found it hard to steel my heart and abandon him. Ah, damn it…Why does he have to be so good at pretending–there’s no way my words scarred him. Why must I feel guilty?

“Hey, just now you made Kim Sangyoon wet himself…..” I eventually pushed at Seo Dawon out of spite, but he did not budge.

Instead, he closed his eyes and brazenly said, “I mean, would I ever do something like that to you?”

“……”

“Hm? Why aren’t you saying anything?”

“…….I don’t think you would.”

“Right?”

“I got it, so move your head.” I stepped to the side and slowly slid my body across the sofa. However, Seo Dawon continued to lean on me–body gradually changing to a horizontal position.

Then…

“Why do you indulge Lackey with hugs but hate it when I just lean on you? We’re both servants….” Seo Dawon complained.

His teasing words raised goosebumps all over my arms!

“You crazy jerk!”

“Isn’t your affection too lopsided?”

“Ha…I guess I was a fool to accept your feelings at face value.” Furiously, I rose from my seat, shoved Seo Dawon off of me, and stomped into my room. From behind, I could hear him giggling.

I was swindled again. Again!

No matter what happens in the future–even if he may cry that his feelings are hurt–I won’t care about him anymore! Resolution firm in my heart, I slammed the bedroom door shut.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Thanks to LeoHP for the kofi~ This bonus chapter is for you >.<

Also have fanart of this chapter (That isn’t embedding for some reason so there’s a link instead >.<) (Source: Guak from Posstype)

null

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Chapter 42

Chapter 42

I thought I had slept with the door locked, but, first thing in the morning, I awoke to Seo Dawon's smiling face standing beside my bed with a mug in hand.

Seo Dawon said to my frowning face, "I have good news and bad news…Which do you want to hear first?" He handed me the mug.

Accepting it with two hands, I noticed the cup contained perfectly heated hot water. After sipping, I replied, "Bad news?"

"I think Kim Sangyoon betrayed us and contacted Bae Jaemin."

"…..What?!"

That's not bad news; that's horrible news! I lept to my feet in surprise. When I saw Seo Dawon's calm demeanor, however, I remembered that he still had 'good news' to deliver. With that in mind, I began to soothe my thumping heartbeat.

"What's the good news?" I asked.

"Jaemin happened to be out of the Hub, so the two couldn't meet…." Seo Dawon smiled wickedly. The grin was so chilling that I unconsciously took another sip of warm water.

….He probably did something to Kim Sangyoon? After half the water in the mug was drunk, I asked, "Kim Sangyoon…You didn't kill him?"

“No. We still need him, after all.” Afterward, he rose from my bedside and opened the door to the bedroom.

What I saw beyond that door…..

“MMmph! MMMmMM!!!” With a completely purple face, Kim Sangyoon kneeled on the floor.

Imagine waking up to a two-meter-long man kneeling in front of my bedroom door as soon as you wake up.

Seo Dawon calmly drawled, “I think we need to educate him a bit before we go to the Dungeon.”

As soon as the doorknob turned, Kim Sangyoon immediately raised his head; his lifted face clearly contained overwhelming traces of anger, embarrassment, and fear.

Unlike his aggressive eyes, the Warrior made no aggressive move and did not spit or curse. The muscles worked underneath a frozen face, cramping from the effort.

Something seemed unnatural, “What…..” I wondered.

Seo Dawon replied from behind me, “Ah. I made it so he couldn’t speak temporarily.”

“……..?”

“Since I brought him in at the crack of dawn, I didn’t want to disturb your sleep.”

The invisible gag, then, must be one of Seo Dawon’s skills. The kneeling Warrior couldn’t utter a single word and only moaned around his unseen restraints.

It was a bit amusing to see him squirming and flaring his nostrils in vain. Amidst my bleary observations, Kim Sangyoon looked mournfully into my eyes, as if he were begging for some compassion.

I asked, “Did you eventually decide to cling onto Bae Jaemin instead?”

Kim Sangyoon leapt up, with his knees still stuck to each other, and shook his head from side to side, desperately denying our accusations.

I felt something hard against the small of my back: to refute Kim Sangyoon’s vehement denial, Seo Dawon poked me with a strange cell phone and placed it in my hands. The cell phone’s lock screen was a selfie of the captive Warrior–the owner of the cell phone was quite clear.

Kim Sangyoon’s face paled when he saw the cell phone in my hand. Keeping watch on his bleached face through the corner of my eye, I quickly read through the last text he had sent to [HaHae Bae Jaemin].

[Jaemin-nim, I have some urgent news to deliver–it regards the Red Lotus Guild and Seo Dawon. Please meet me in front of [Owl’s Ghost Ship] normal route entrance.]

Obviously, this text was clear evidence of betrayal. The location of the meet-up was where we had agreed, yesterday, for power leveling.

“Mmmh!! Mmmh!” Kim Sangyoon kept shaking his body as if he was in a hurry to explain his actions, but, after seeing the text, I lost any crumb of sympathy I had for the man.

So, I ignored him and gazed pleadingly at Seo Dawon.

“Rest assured. He hasn’t sent the message yet.” He said.

I finally released a deep sigh, containing the stress that had been building up this morning.

Seo Dawon continued, “For now, just listen to me…since Kim Sangyoon can’t see me….”

Seo Dawon explained the events that led to Kim Sangyoon’s circumstances. “Originally, this contract was used to tame intelligent monsters captured by the ‘Tamer’ class….”

In the middle of his explanation, Seo Dawon told me to flick my finger–a set punishment gesture–at the Warrior. Though I didn't fully understand his instructions and felt a bit uncomfortable with the idea of 'punishment,' I did as he asked.

As soon as I finished flicking my fingers, Kim Sangyoon's body suddenly startled to tremble all over. He twisted his body, and choked sounds spilled out of his gagged throat. Something supernatural–invisible–seemed to be strangling him.

W-What if he dies?

My hands nervously rubbed each other; the shock made my fingers tremble, a mirror image to Kim Sangyoon's own struggles.

"If you want to stop the 'punishment,' just flick your finger again." Seo Dawon calmly explained, as if he were reading a manual for a new home appliance. I hastily flicked my finger.

With a loud clap, Kim Sangyoon's twisting and squirming also ceased… Kim Sangyoon cried, but still couldn't move from his kneeling position; unable to change his position, he bent over and tucked his head between his thighs.

"Hmmm….." I stared at his weeping back with mixed feelings. This is torture……

"There's 'rewards' too. Try patting Kim Sangyoon's head, gently."

I looked back at Seo Dawon, suspiciously, but Seo Dawon urged me, "Are you going to just drag him along like that?" With no other choice, I raised my hands over his bright red hair.

After stroking his hair twice, I quickly pulled my hand back and observed him. And…I made eye contact with Kim Sangyoon's bloodshot eyes.

His gaze looked strangely hazy. His was not an expression of someone who had just endured painful torture but looked, instead, like he had taken recreational drugs. I retreated a few steps, disgusted.

Seo Dawon continued, voice laden with an unusual steadiness, “A ‘submission contract’ literally compels the subject to obey…They will fear disobeying commands and experience the joy of obedience. After using the ‘punishment’ and ‘reward’ commands a few times, the subjects will get used to the contract.”

“…..”

“What do you think? Effective, isn’t it?”

Of course, it was impressively *effective*.

It was *horrifically* impressive.

Seo Dawon didn’t seem to notice my haggard expression and encouraged me to train Kim Sangyoon using the ‘reward’ and ‘punishment’ commands. “Why don’t you try it two more times?”

Ha……

I refused to follow his suggestions and closed the bedroom door with trembling hands. Seo Dawon and I were left alone in my room; he stared at me, mysteriously.

“How did you know Kim Sangyoon betrayed us?” I asked.

“….Well, I downloaded a program I had since long ago onto Kim Sangyoon’s phone. I could keep an eye on him and his activity through his phone.”

Had he messed with the phone while Kim Sangyoon took his shower….?

I nodded at Seo Dawon in lieu of an answer. Seo Dawon continued, “Then, I sent Bae Jaemin and Lim Jisoo a message from an unknown sender. About sighting Lim Jisoo’s brother outside the Hub…Ah! I

managed to contact my former client and received his help. I didn't reveal that I'm Seo Dawon, but the client had sent me a number to call–for any favor–after I fulfilled their request."

That's why Bae Jaemin had left the Hub in such a hurry this morning. I tried to suppress my complicated feelings and looked up at him. "But… Why didn't you say something to me…."

"Ah, of course I would normally let you know all this….but your acting was so bad."

"….."

"Kim Sangyoon needed to be fooled by you as well. He needed to feel as if you 100% believed in him…That's why I didn't inform you of my plans."

I couldn't really deny his words, so I eventually decided that I couldn't really blame Seo Dawon for our current crisis.

Soon, I began to grow angry at Kim Sangyoon's deception. Sangyoon, you punk…Were all those tears yesterday nothing but smokes and illusions? We even gave you a skill!

I truly believed the sincerity of his desire to kill Ahn Joosung…I guess he was method acting. He should have been an actor instead of a User… Damn it.

"I was tricked when I asked him if he wanted to kill Ahn Joosung…Ah, so annoying."

"He might have changed his mind after he returned home." Seo Dawon said–a paltry effort to appease me with his soothing smile.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Remember when Dawon said that rankers are a bit…questionable? In ammoral fights like this, MC really does feel like the shrimp in a whale's fight. Thanks for reading! I'll have a bonus chapter (so two chapters?) tomorrow (hopefully)!

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Chapter 43

Chapter 43

“Since we still need Kim Sangyoon to level you up, we should slowly take our time to interrogate him.” Seo Dawon spoke as if the Warrior was only a tool to be used.

I felt complicated when I saw this side of him.

Of course, if Kim Sangyoon had succeeded in his plan to betray us…we would have been in quite the bind.

Seo Dawon was bound by 24-hour cooldown time, so he wouldn’t have been able to manifest and use the same abilities he casted to overpower Kim Sangyoon. If I had encountered Bae Jaemin alone, I would have been captured and dragged away or, in the worst-case scenario, killed.

I don’t know what Kim Sangyoon was trying to gain by betraying us, but he couldn’t have been keeping my safety in mind when he contacted Bae Jaemin…So, I had no particular complaint that Seo Dawon treated Kim Sangyoon harshly. If it were yesterday, maybe I could have mustered up the pretense to protest.

However, what bothered me is that there were times when I felt like Seo Dawon was gently nudging me to convert to his perspective and his way of handling issues.

This time, his cold attitude towards the Warrior placed unspoken pressure on me as well as the man in question…..I felt that my ghostly

partner wanted me to get used to the idea of torture and treating others as tools.

“How long will you keep Kim Sangyoon alive?” I asked.

Seo Dawon smiled brightly and avoided answering directly, “For as long as you need him?”

This jerk… He always acts like he follows my instructions, but he…

“First, let’s revive Garam and think about this matter later. Garam-ie will plot a good route for you.”

“……Fine.” I heaved a deep sigh and opened the bedroom door again.

There Kim Sangyoon, who seemed to have returned to his senses, sat, looking at me with baleful eyes.

* * *

[Owl’s Ghost Ship] was a leveling Dungeon important to Users and parties under level 60.

The rewards were insignificant, but the Dungeon was essential for Users who wanted to gain a massive amount of experience. After the community weighed the difficulty against other places, daily tours of [Owl’s Ghost Ship] were determined as one of the safest ways to escape the early tribulations of being a User.

I’ve been to [Owl’s Ghost Ship] once before.

In the past, when I still was ignorant about everything, I heard that level 32~35 Users could easily gain levels with a 10-person party. I entered a random group that recruited level 32 Users… Excited, I worked hard and

leveled up twice, but, as I happily began to leave the Dungeon, the leader of the party suddenly ran up to me and grabbed me by the collar.

The Dungeon was incredibly popular, and many Users milled around in front of the entrance waiting for their turn. With little regard as to our audience, the party leader threw me down onto the ground, shouting “Did you come here to get carried? If even one person was hurt, I would have sued you!”

I turned to the other party members, requesting help silently, but they all looked so cold. Faced with such rejection, I couldn’t properly defend myself.

I was so embarrassed that I came home crying that day… Of course, I haven’t returned since. Additionally, I holed myself up at home for a week after that incident, worried that anyone in the audience would post about that spectacle on internet forums.

That was 8 months ago, and I had willfully forgotten about my shame….As I got closer to the open clearing in front of the Dungeon’s entrance, though, the nightmare of that day bubbled up from the recesses of my memories, and I couldn’t control my winces.

“…..? Is something wrong?”

“Lee-kyung-nim, Is something making you uncomfortable?”

[Clack clack?]

Unfortunately, my party members seemed to sense my reluctance.

Seo Dawon touched my forehead, “Why are you grimacing like that?” Kim Sangyoon continued to look nervously at my lips. Meanwhile, Lackey bit my hand very gently to grab my attention. When I looked down at it, Lackey rubbed its head against my palm and acted cutely.

I managed to regain my composure with the strength of my companions’ worries.

Yeah. It’s different from last time. Today, I’ll be entering with these three, without anyone to cruelly humiliate me for being weak… It’ll be alright.

So, I released a short sigh and said, “I’m fine now. Let’s go in?” to the companions who still searched my complexion for signs of ill health. I took the lead and approached the entrance to the Dungeon.

As we approached, however, I felt other Users pointing and looking towards us. I warily observed them through the corner of my eyes, wondering if they were staring at me or Lackey…

“Huh?”

“Kim Sangyoon?”

“It’s Kim Sangyoon!”

The red-haired Warrior’s name frequently appeared amongst the whispered chatter.

Ah, that’s right…Kim Sangyoon’s a famous person…

I had briefly forgotten about Kim Sangyoon’s original identity and internet career because of his pathetic impression yesterday and today. He was a highly influential streamer; over 10,000 people would regularly watch his live streams…

“It seems Kim Sangyoon is popular?” Seo Dawon asked as he looked at the crowding Users in fascination. “Seriously?” He said in disbelief, pointing at some of the Users that were now happily filming Kim Sangyoon with their camera.

Seo Dawon simply couldn’t adapt to the changing times: Kim Sangyoon must have been a User during Dawon’s tenure–but nothing too special compared to the other rankers.

Just then…

“I-I’m sorry….”

An ant-sized voice trembled out from behind. Kim Sangyoon, bent at the waist like a folder, bowed and apologized to me.

I stepped towards him in surprise. Kim Sangyoon also began to step forward as well, speaking in a bizarrely sincere tone, “I-I didn’t tell anyone about it, I swear. They just all showed up…I’m sorry for how loud it is here. Y-you looked as if you were in a bad mood… Is it my fault? T-that’s not it, right? I-If I…by any chance, did anything to displease you….”

Is this guy a fool? How could you so suddenly apologize to me, with a deep bow, when we’re in the public eye?

I squinted at Kim Sangyoon, wondering if he was purposefully acting this way to thwart my plans, but the man suddenly avoided my gaze and looked at the ground. He genuinely seemed frightened.

Well, considering the chain of events both yesterday and today, I could understand his paranoia…I was left with no choice but to pull at his arm roughly and whisper, “It’s all right, so stop apologizing.”

I had hoped my words would bring him some comfort….but, Kim Sangyoon rigidly shut his mouth, still anxious but eager to follow my orders.

The audience’s wandering stares began to calm down as well; luckily, most of them were situated farther away and did not grasp the suspicious nature of our interaction.

They must have thought Kim Sangyoon and I were simply messing around. Though people periodically glanced at us curiously, no one reacted strangely. Only then did I sigh in relief and take my arms off Kim Sangyoon’s.

“It seems Sangyoon is already floating on cloud nine.” Seo Dawon clicked his tongue. [1]

I was a bit frustrated at his aloof tone, as if this matter didn't affect him. Honestly, this is all because of you! However, when I followed Seo Dawon's gaze to the Warrior, I was a little flustered.

'The look on his face…That's like when he received his 'reward'."

He looked a bit creepy….but at least his previous nervous behavior was hidden away.

Ignoring my discomfort, we were finally ready to enter [Owl's Ghost Ship.]

"It's time." Seo Dawon murmured.

"….Lee-kyung-nim. It seems we're going in soon…."

[Clack Clack!]

The cracks in the Dungeon in front of us began to glow yellow.

For the first time in my career as a User, I was the party leader. Thankfully, nothing happened to trigger my nerves. I sent Kim Sangyoon a party invitation, and the Warrior appeared on my party members list. 10 seconds later, a system message informed me that [Party member 'Kim Sangyoon' has confirmed ready status]. It seems the difference between being a member and a leader were these small logistical details…

»»————————-　　————————-««

Would you like to challenge [Owl's Ghost Ship] Normal Mode?

[Yes] [No]

»»————————-　　————————-««

Just before the yellow light from the Dungeon filled the clearing, a window popped up, confirming our entry. I pressed [Yes].

TL: The eagerness to betray was real in Kim Sangyoon, lmao.

Footnotes

1. The original used a phrase that’s literally translated as “he’s far gone” or “he’s already mentally checked out.” There could be a lot of contextual uses for it, so I chose what I felt to be the closest English equivalent–far gone with pleasure.

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Chapter 44

Chapter 44

When entering [Owl’s Ghost Ship], you can first feel the saltiness of the sea through your skin. After opening your eyes, the boundless expanse of open water stretched underneath the dark night sky.

When I first loaded into the Dungeon, I stood still, unable to properly adjust to the moving field–a specialty of the Ghost Ship Dungeon…My senses were thrown into disarray, as most Dungeon settings were placed in caves or forests. A huge boat wasn’t a normal setting for finding and defeating monsters.

‘Lackey’s’ appearance has changed to ‘Skeleton Soldier.’

[Clack Clack!]

Still, I had been to this Dungeon once before so I didn’t stand around stupidly and immediately called out Lackey. Afterward, I hid in the shadow of a gigantic mast. Lackey transformed into its Skeleton Soldier state and started crawling up the tallest watchtower at my command.

Since [Owl’s Ghost Ship] was so well-known, the proper method of raiding and various dungeoneering tips had already disseminated into internet repositories. I already knew how best to move.

A phantom pirate, a ghost-type monster, stood guard on the highest watchtower. If a party continued on without dealing with it first, the system would alarm [You have been discovered!], and other pirates would be summoned on board–making it quite difficult to proceed from the very start of the raid.

Therefore, it was common for Users with high mobility skills to climb the tower or Summoners to send their summons to deal with the monster. That’s why I had quickly mobilized Lackey.

“Oh~, It seems like you’ve been here before?” Seo Dawon complimented, noticing my swift ministrations. I slightly nodded in response and looked towards Kim Sangyoon, standing in front of me.

Holding Berserker in hand, Sangyoon had begun to cover me. I had no idea when he had summoned his weapon. If Lackey were to fall off the tower or if the phantom pirate were to discover us first, arrows would start raining from its location. He held his sword at an angle, like a shield, to counter that possibility.

»»————————-　　————————-««

Servant ‘Lackey’ has defeated the ‘Ghost Ship’s Sparrow.’

You’ve successfully made a ‘covert entry!’

‘Captain Owl’ is currently asleep…

»»————————-　　————————-««

Fortunately, not long after, a message popped up indicating Lackey’s success. At the same time, something splashed into the water, as if it were flung from the watchtower.

Afterward, a small shadow slowly descended the mast.

Since the ‘Sparrow’ was defeated, that shadow must be Lackey, right…?

I had thought that Lackey could succeed because of its recent strengthening…But this exceeded all my expectations. The Sparrow was defeated far sooner than I predicted.

When I first tried to break through this stage, I sent Lackey to the watchtower on the Party leader’s command. However, instead of overpowering the ‘Sparrow,’ Lackey broke halfway through, and someone else had to climb the tower to finish its job…

Looking at Lackey now, though, it seems to have gotten much stronger. Relieved of my worries, I rushed to follow Kim Sangyoon who had already taken the lead.

»»————————-　　————————-««

You have passed the ‘watchtower.’ Now entering the ‘Food Storage.’ Don’t let your guard down! The pirates here play poker until dawn.

»»————————-　　————————-««

The system message popped up to alert us of the new stage when Sangyoon and I meandered in front of a small door. When the door opened, sounds of conversation could be heard farther inside.

In the hallway beyond the open door, there was a small room–yellow lights from within brightening the otherwise dark hall. As Kim Sangyoon and I approached carefully, we could see ‘pirates’ sitting at a circular table within the room.

I’ve already seen it once before, but I’m still surprised…

Honestly, this wasn’t really a scene I could get used to no matter how many times I saw it. Since the monsters were classified as pirates, I had

expected enemies with humanoid forms, but all three of them, sitting there and holding cards in their….hands…..were giant birds!

Then the ‘Sparrow’ from before was, probably, literally a sparrow?

The monster with its back turned completely to us was a ‘Crow.’ Next to him, a Crane sat, legs crossed underneath its chair. Across the table, sat the ‘Peacock,’ who could make eye contact with us if it just turned its head a little…Various kinds of birds were all sitting together and playing poker.

On unlucky runs, parties would have to deal with a fourth bird: a ‘Goose’ that appeared randomly…Fortunately, today the Goose was not present.

After taking stock of the enemies, Kim Sangyoon looked towards me. Is he waiting for me to signal an attack? Awkwardly, I nodded at him.

“Rending Cleave!” Kim Sangyoon rushed at the poker-playing pirates with his Berserker. With the force of the skill driving the greatsword–and the whistling sound of air–the table was split in two. Unfortunately, the birds agilely dodged, and only the table was halved.

[Is that ‘Sparrow’ bastard sleeping?]

[Oh my? It seems I have no choice but to fold this round.]

[Don’t make me laugh. You’re making excuses because you were losing.]

[Did Crane plan for these guys to be here?]

[Ohohohohohoh!]

The birds, scattered in all different directions, turned towards us.

The peacock displayed its flamboyant tail, the crane began to stretch out its legs, and, finally, the Crow put glasses on its beak…All three did not hide their disdain for us in their conversation, but I could feel the bloodthirst emanating from their lustrous eyes.

Kim Sangyoon and I stood back to back and began to confront the three birds.

Seo Dawon seemed to be mumbling something meaningless. “Why, of all times, are there only three enemies?” He raised his hands, fingertips already gathering golden light.

Seeing Dawon’s combat-ready stance, I shouted, “Summon Lackey!” Finally, I would battle as a proper Necromancer.

[Clack Clack!!]

However, as soon as Lackey appeared beside me, my heart grimaced.

My skeleton may have gotten larger and received a hefty, blunt weapon, but I wondered if the current situation was going to overwhelm it… However, thinking again, I suffered far too much humiliation here… Treating the fight like a chance for revenge, I steeled my heart and gave Lackey an order.

“Lackey, Bite!”

Simultaneously, the pirates, who had been observing our every movement, rushed at us.

Lackey opened its mouth incredibly wide–to the limits of its jaw joint–and snapped it shut with a loud ‘Clack!’ The ringing sound was on a different scale than its previous bite attack. Heart beating fast, I looked forward to the results.

The first pirate to attack was the ‘Peacock.’

The innumerable ‘eyes’ on its tail moved–disgustingly–observing me before I had even summoned Lackey. When Lackey snapped its mouth shut, the Peacock rushed in; the tail feathers trembled and shot something at Lackey with a ‘Bang!’ sound.

Lackey avoided the attack by lying flat on the floor, showcasing its new flexibility. Judging by the tiny black holes left behind after Lackey dodged,

the Peacock’s tail could utilize a skill that released bullet-like destructive power.

Lackey did not hesitate to pounce and ‘bite’ at the peacock’s tail.

[Ugh! I’m getting mad!]

Unfortunately, the location of the bite was not very painful, and the peacock did not suffer too much. The tail, however, proved to be important to the peacock; it stepped back and began to trim the tattered tail nervously.

Lackey chewed on the colorful feathers in its mouth and spat it out. Slowly, crouching like a frog, the Skeleton Soldier opened its mouth wide and leapfrogged at the peacock again. Perhaps the peacock judged those tail feathers to be too precious, the bird continued the battle with its wings and beaks instead–unwilling to let more precious feathers get bitten.

In response, Lackey did not hesitate to pounce and ‘bite’ at the peacock’s tail.

Lackey was a skeleton and was superior in hand-to-hand fights. It was almost laughable to see the peacock’s beak pierce Lackey’s empty eye sockets. Those kinds of attacks won’t work!

[Kreeeeee!]

The peacock bashed Lackey’s head with its wings. Such a blow might mean a mortal wound to an ordinary User, but Lackey’s skull simply spun around on its spine. The skeleton pulled out the peacock’s body feathers with its bone-white arms.

This time, the attack was quite painful, so the peacock shrieked. Blood dripped at the ends of the plucked feathers.

Lackey, you little rascal…You’re doing much better than I expected?

Relieved by Lackey’s performance, I looked towards Kim Sangyoon… Sadly, the Warrior was still struggling in his battle against the ‘Crane.’

Just then, for example, the crane's fierce kick grazed Kim Sangyoon's cheek. The crane generally attacked with its long legs, and Kim Sangyoon was unable to adapt to the fast pace and stumbled around in confusion.

[Ohoho. How dull and heavy, let me put you in your place!]

"Ahhh! Why can't I catch you! Fuck!"

Though the crane's legs look thin at first glance, the fierce sound of air splitting rang in the room whenever Kim Sangyoon avoided the kicks.

Additionally, using its white wings, the crane floated in midair; the legs would brush past Kim Sangyoon's head several times…..If those were direct hits, wouldn't the skull have burst?

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I feel like a proud mom watching Lackey T_T

Bonus chapter courtesy of LeoHP! Thanks so much for the kofi~

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Chapter 45

Chapter 45

As for the [Crow]…

Thunk–

[Ugh….!! What is this wall?]

The Crow was held a short way away from the rest of us. Like a pantomime, it wasn't able to cross an invisible line, as if it were blocked by something.

Its presence felt strangely indistinct, though it would slam its wings into the air or open its beak to protest.

If I didn't purposefully search for the crow, who was unable to join the battle, I would have overlooked it in the corner…The other pirate birds were also engaged in their own battles, and they didn't seem to pay attention to their missing brethren.

If one carefully scrutinized the [Crow's] situation, a thin gold line was on the floor, circling the perimeter of our battle. No matter how much it stamped its feet, it could not cross that line and could only circle us.

Seo Dawon spread his palms out, behind the crow, and his fingertips glowed with the same golden color as the line.

Of course, this peculiar division was engineered by Seo Dawon's ability. I was relieved to see Seo Dawon's handicraft; if the [Crow] had not

been properly isolated the battle would not be so well-matched.

I tried to gauge how long he could maintain his spell, but, seeing Dawon's lack of complaints and relaxed expression, I turned back to the battle, confident in his ability.

I thought I should do something, rather than staying still, so I looked left and right–the two battlefronts.

The battles on both sides were tight, but I decided it would be better to join Kim Sangyoon, who was gradually getting pushed back. I contemplated how best to help and took a small dagger out of my inventory.

Hmmm…..If I throw this, will I grab the crane's attention?

So, I approached Kim Sangyoon with a dagger in hand and aimed the dagger at opportunistic gaps between their clashes.

"You aren't going to throw that, right?"

"Nngh!"

I heard Seo Dawon's voice above my head. He must have crossed the room to hover behind my back in the minute I took my eyes off of him.

Additionally, I was surprised to feel the weight of his hands pressing on my shoulder and shouted, "What?!" I quickly turned to check on his opponent, the [Crow.]

The [Crow] was stopped in its tracks, unable to budge except for the nervous eyes rolling around in its sockets…Just when did he subdue it, anyway?

Before I could ask what his intentions were, Seo Dawon reached out and grabbed the hand that held the dagger. "It's dangerous to drag its attention onto you like this. Even if Kim Sangyoon's slow…his body is tough. It's not as dangerous as you think it is."

“Ahhh..” I hurriedly lowered my hands at his explanation. “I’m sorry I stepped in,” I added, thinking I almost made another fatal mistake for no benefit.

The trauma of being humiliated by the other party began to rush back into my memories, but Seo Dawon smiled and whispered, “That’s not what I meant…You have a better weapon than that dagger.” He brandished his hands.

Golden lines were drawn from his outstretched fingertip. At first, the thin line was manipulated into a simple circle, but similar shapes began to appear until they began to overlap and fold, forming complex geometric patterns in the blink of an eye.

It looked like an unfurling bud of a lotus flower?

The conjured magic circle shrank, smaller and smaller, until it could fit in Seo Dawon’s palm. As it compressed, the glow became brighter. When the circle shrunk until it was the size of a finger, it stopped with a clicking noise.

“Thunder Calling.” Seo Dawon muttered softly. The magic circle now burned so brightly that it was hard to look at it with bare eyes. I briefly blinked to avoid being blinded, but the magic circle had disappeared in that short moment. Instead, I felt an unusual airflow.

How should I describe it…..Should I say that a suffocating humidity, like the heavy steam of a sauna, had permeated the air?

The pirate birds, opposing my other party members, had also noticed the presence of something unusual; they retreated with their guards raised, warily waiting for my initiative, ignoring Lackey and Kim Sangyoon.

Since they couldn’t see Seo Dawon, they must be paying attention to where they can sense the origin of the magic…

“What just…..” Kim Sangyoon also felt the disturbance caused by the skill. He ran, a little exhausted, to me with questions in his eyes. Even

Lackey had started to run towards me as well.

What could I even say? I was in a bind…

Suddenly, a small light flashed above the birds' heads; soon afterward the rumbling of thunder could be heard.

Though the Dungeon field was set on a pirate ship, the current battle was waged indoors, below deck; the lightning storm could not have been a natural occurrence. Clearly, this was one of Seo Dawon's skills…

But the lightning struck once or twice in some unrelated places and then subsided. That couldn't possibly be all? I glanced up at Seo Dawon, who was still grabbing my shoulder.

….Don't tell me…How could you fail when you looked so confident?

Kim Sangyoon adorned an ambiguous expression as he alternated between looking at the floor and my face.

–Bam!

–Crash!

–Boom!

It was then!

Before that small lightning's after image disappeared, a thick lightning pillar suddenly appeared, with a large roar, from the ceiling and struck the same location three times.

Holes were visible in the floor where lightning struck and wooden chips–off the ship's wooden planks–scattered in all directions.

Without allowing a moment for surprise, lightning began to strike dozens of times, each adding to the din of thunder and each faster than before. So little time passed before each strike, and so the lightning seemed as if it blended to form a huge pillar of light.

It did not stop there. The column began to move slowly, electrically burning everything it touched. A small lightning tornado was created indoors.

[Clack clack….!]

Perhaps Lackey was also fascinated by the events as I was, it kept turning its head here and there trying to follow the tornado with its empty eye sockets.

The tornado moved slowly, releasing threatening electrical sounds. Starting with the poker table, everything slowly turned into powder.

The pirate birds ran away, trying to escape that column of light. Flapping their wings, they began to take flight. Although the ceiling was quite high, the storeroom was still situated indoors; even with wings, the lightning was difficult to avoid.

[Kyaaaak!]

In particular, the crow, which had previously been held still by Seo Dawon's skills, was already facing the lightning column before its very eyes by the time he came back to his senses.

I had predicted the grisly end of the crow and crumpled my eyebrows, but the tornado, strangely, slipped past the bird and continued to move forward. The crow didn't miss the opportunity and quickly fled to the ceiling.

"If I killed it with this, you won't be able to gain experience," Seo Dawon said.

"….."

So, Seo Dawon intentionally let them live.

I looked at the sheltered birds perched 1.5 stories above us and then looked at him, wondering how we were going to reach the opponents.

More than that, the tornado began to diminish, the blinding glare of light gradually faded away. After the glow had completely disappeared, I could get a proper look at the stage field, which was burnt to cinders and in charred ruins.

“Umm…It seems that you weren’t able to catch a single one…” Kim Sangyoon said, next to me, as if he were a bit frustrated.

I rolled my eyes cryptically, “Just wait a minute, please.” I folded my arms to seem more confident; Seo Dawon probably had a good reason.

“The [Goose] wasn’t here, right?” Seo Dawon said.

“…..”

“Wouldn’t it be better–for leveling–to defeat at least one more monster?” As soon as Seo Dawon spoke, a large ‘crunch’ could be heard from nearby. The door on the other side of the room was torn open with a bang!

[Do you know how long it’s been since the captain’s slept? Are you guys crazy?]

A very large and white [Goose] appeared.

‘Owl’s right-hand man, Goose ‘Pepe’ has arrived!

Event Scenario – ‘Owl’s Insomnia’ has been triggered by meeting special conditions.

‘Captain Owl’ is currently angry because he has been disturbed from his rest…

TL: I return with two chaps~ Thanks for sitting by while the website was down~!

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Chapter 46

Chapter 46

The monsters to watch out for in [Owl's Ghost Ship] were the sparrow and our erstwhile poker-playing opponents, the crane, crow, and peacock.

However, very rarely, a goose may inexplicably appear in the crew's quarters.

Not much was known about the pattern of the goose's appearance, but Seo Dawon seemed to have known something about the Dungeon conditions, considering how he was disappointed at the sight of only three birds and called the fourth one out on his own accord…

"Can we even deal with the goose? What's with the 'event scenario' anyway…' Kim Sangyoon, who sidled closer to me, muttered to himself.

I glanced questioningly at Seo Dawon, asking what we should do now… Before Seo Dawon could say anything, however, Kim Sangyoon came closer and asked "Um, what's the cool downtime for the skill you used earlier?"

He sounded a little excited…Perhaps he mistook Seo Dawon's [Thunder Calling] for something I did.

Once again, I raised my eyebrows at Seo Dawon after listening to Kim Sangyoon's question. I wanted answers quickly, but Seo Dawon only shook his head, aggravatingly.

“That’s…I probably won’t be able to do that again today.” In the end, I could only offer vague answers and bowed my head.

Kim Sangyoon was disappointed, “Ah, of course, the cooldown time for such an impressive skill is….” He glanced at the pirate birds, warily, and lowered his voice. “Excuse me, but…About that skill just now.”

“Yes?”

“Is that one of a Necromancer’s skills?”

“…..”

Of course not.

If a Necromancer could do that, would everyone call it doomed class?

But, I simply nodded, aware that to others it would seem as if I had been the one to cast the spell.

“Oooh….” Kim Sangyoon admired, fully believing in his misunderstanding. “Then, maybe, did you receive that skill during the Tower of Command?”

I didn’t answer, but Kim Sangyoon seemed to accept my silence as confirmation.

“Lee-kyung-nim. If you were to live stream yourself, I think public perception of Necromancers would completely reverse.”

“…..”

“At first, I thought that somehow Seo Dawon had followed us. Your skills are as spectacular as a Mage’s.”

It was hard to keep a straight face at his shockingly sharp intuition.

I guess it was obviously more of a Mage’s style.

I contemplated on how best to cover this glaring flaw, but Seo Dawon said, “Just ignore him,” stopping me from indulging in bad acting.

Fortunately, the awkward conversation naturally halted as the goose came to the forefront in the nick of time. ‘Thump, Thump, Thump,’ With heavy footsteps, it outpaced all the other birds.

Lackey had quieted its clacking–even Kim Sangyoon, in the midst of more questions, had shut his mouth–and watched the goose.

With a casual glance, anyone could see that the goose was twice as large as the other birds and carried a poise befitting ‘Owl’s right-hand man.’ Thinking the battle was about to resume, I prepared to send out Lackey… But, suddenly, the goose looked at us and held a wingtip close to its beak.

The pose looked quite similar to a ‘shhh!’ gesture. Subconsciously, I stopped; we all quietly watched the large bird.

[Do you know why our pirate crew is called ‘Owl’s Ghost Ship?’]

Of course, I had no idea–I had only entered this Dungeon once before and had never spoken with the goose.

The goose continued as if he didn’t really expect a response from us.

[Our pirate crew’s captain, Owl hyung-nim…He’s very sensitive. He detests when things are chaotic or noisy.] [1]

The crane, peacock, and crow nodded sympathetically with the goose’s words.

[So our pirate ship was built to be silent when it moved–of course, every room was soundproofed as well. Other ships would not know they are being approached until just before the attack. That’s the origin of the nickname, ‘Ghost Ship.’]

The goose, who had been patiently explaining so far, had suddenly wrinkled its forehead and became angry.

[But you guys blew this whole room up and made so much noise! It’s been a while since my Owl hyung-nim fell asleep without stress…Are you crazy? You wouldn’t have boarded this ship without knowing how Owl hyung-nim is!]

All I knew about Captain Owl was that he was the boss of this ghost ship and that he was shaped like a huge owl. Even though I joined a party to raid this place, I didn’t really see–let alone fight–Captain Owl because I was dealing with mobs from afar…

An owl suffering from neurotic insomnia…

But the goose didn’t stop there. He took out a wooden box from behind his back, which he had been dragging along for quite some time, and dropped it onto the ground with a thud.

[I guess it doesn’t really help if you got all this way ignorant of your misdeeds. He’s incredibly angry now, but he’ll grow sleepy when his stomach is full….I’ll comfort him with fresh human flesh today.]

While speaking viciously, the goose took out two sashimi knives out of the wooden box.

As expected, we’re still going to battle? “Lackey, come forward,” I ordered…but the goose intercepted and clanged the blunt of its knives over its head. Suddenly, my ears felt numb, and I could temporarily no longer hear anything.

What? What’s this…!

I was not the only one disoriented; Kim Sangyoon also seemed to suffer the same effect. It was exactly like wearing noise-canceling headphones with no music.

You've been struck by the 'silence' status ailment. You've been restricted from using skills that require commands.

You are unable to issue commands to your servants.

The system message kindly informed me of my condition.

What the hell is this!

I ignored the message's guidance and rushed to strain my vocal cords and call out to Lackey.

Fortunately, Lackey looked back at me and ran towards my side…But, when I ordered, "Lackey, attack!" The skeleton continued to hover in my general area and did not spare a single glance for the pirate birds flying in front.

"Lackey! Look in front of you! In front of you!" As I beckoned before him desperately, Lackey only tilted its head; its mouth stayed shut.

I looked at Lackey's current mood in his status window in frustration…

[I don't know…this is too difficult….]

Eventually, I gave up urging Lackey and looked towards Seo Dawon.

I don't suppose I'm unable to communicate with the Mage as well? Then, things will be really tough…

"You don't hear me, do you?" I said.

"Umm…What did you say just now? I have no idea."

Damn.

I couldn’t believe what was happening.

At least I could hear Seo Dawon’s voice normally…I prepared to strain my vocal cords until bursting, but I changed my mind. I formed each word with my lips very deliberately and slowly, clearly enunciating each word.

It seems my method wasn’t effective, for Seo Dawon only looked at me puzzled, unable to respond. Still, he seems to have gotten a hint, “Did you get hit with a status effect or a curse?”

I nodded quickly.

Seo Dawon continued, “It seems like you’ve been silenced?” I nodded furiously once again. He asked, “How many minutes are left?”

I held out five fingers.

This knowledge was gleaned from my status window. [Status effect: Silence] was displayed next to my level; and the remaining time for that condition was shown in red.

5 minutes and 22 seconds remaining.

“That’s a bit difficult…Do you think Sangyoon can hold out for five minutes?” Seo Dawon said in a tone that did not seem to indicate any kind of worry.

He was now standing alone at the battlefront against four pirate birds. He struggled when he fought the crane…The current situation was very bleak.

I looked at Kim Sangyoon whose cheek was slashed by the goose’s large sashimi knife. The sight raised goosebumps on my skin; I looked back at Seo Dawon and asked urgently, “I-Is there no other way?”

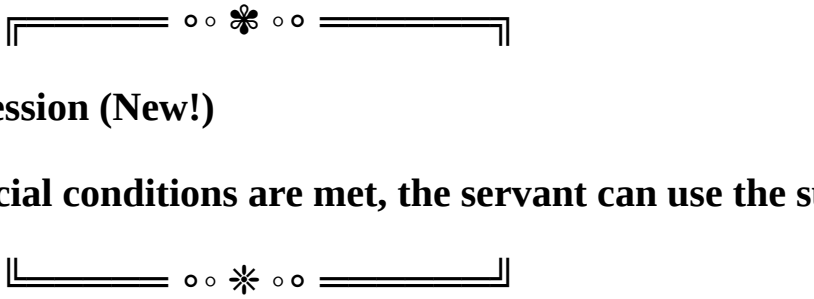
“When you’re silenced, all skills to directly utilize your servant have all been blocked…But there’s one thing you can do.” He said.

So, I turned back to the status window and read through my list of skills again.

Most of the skills were colored red, meaning they were not available at present time, but one skill remained unchanged.

-Possession (New!)

If special conditions are met, the servant can use the summoner's body.



TL: "All I know about Captain Owl is that it's an Owl" is giving me major "People die when they are killed" vibes, lmao.

Thanks so much, Mufasa for the love! This bonus chapter is for your first donation!

Footnotes

1. Hyung is what young men call older men if they are a) brothers or b) Close friends. Just a refresher.

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Chapter 47

Chapter 47

He wanted to possess me?

When I first saw this skill, I didn't ever want to use it because I was a bit leery of the skill's name and description.

I had wondered what it would be like…But I can't help but be repulsed by the idea of a stranger–whether or not they're a servant–entering my body. It reminded me of old ghost stories: bodies getting snatched away by evil spirits, etc.

Of course, Seo Dawon was the only evil spirit near, and there is very little chance that he would want to rob me of my body, but…

"L-Lee-kyung-nim!"

However, when I heard Kim Sangyoon's increasingly blood-curdling screams, I felt that I was not in a situation where I could allow myself to fear such ghost stories.

Let's at least save Kim Sangyoon first.

To be honest, I had no lingering affection for the man. Further, as long as I had Seo Dawon, Kim Sangyoon's death was not likely to affect my life… However, it felt wrong to leave another human to their death…

In the end, I hurriedly shouted "Possession!" without further questioning Seo Dawon's intentions.

‘Possession’ skill has been executed…Please select a servant.

A blue system message window popped up before my eyes. Inside the message, my servant’s names, [Lackey] and [Seo Dawon], were listed, one after the other.

Above the names, glistening holograms depicting the two floated in the air–like choosing a character when playing Street Fighter. In addition, a symbolic marker lit up next to their displays.

Lackey’s symbol was shaped like a white skull; Seo Dawon’s was shaped like a golden star. Without delay, I chose the star.

You have selected ‘Seo Dawon.’

Evaluating assimilation rate…

Currently, your assimilation rate is 50%! The closer the rate is to 100%, the stronger the skill will be

Would you like to solve the ‘Synchronization Quiz’ to raise the assimilation rate?

Synchronization….? What on earth is this?

While I hesitated, the message automatically selected [Yes], and the message updated with [Quiz start!].

At the same time, I could see another blue system message rising not only in my view but also in front of Seo Dawon as well. After reading the message seriously, Seo Dawon raised his hand to touch the window, inputting options. I was curious as to what he wrote.

Preoccupied with watching Seo Dawon, I glanced at my own window much later. My face crumpled…

What is Seo Dawon’s favorite color?

1) Purple 2) Gold 3) Black 4) Blue 5) Red

A totally ridiculous question had appeared in the message window.

How am I supposed to know this…? Is *this* supposed to be the quiz that boosts the assimilation rate? I was speechless.

At the top, a countdown [5….4…3…] pressured me to choose quickly, so I pressed number 3 without much further thought.

However, the message turned red and made an unpleasant error noise as soon as my finger touched number 3.

The system notified me, [The correct answer is number 2]

You may have failed the quiz, but Servant Seo Dawon has answered correctly so the assimilation rate will increase.

The current assimilation rate is 57%…

Starting ‘Possession’…

Did Seo Dawon answer a similar question to mine?

I had no time to be dumbfounded; I closed my eyes as mild dizziness washed over me. When I opened them again, the first thing I saw was the back of my head.

“Ha…..” [I] turned my head to look at me and heaved a short sigh. As soon as our eyes met, [I], that is Seo Dawon, smiled with an expression that I would never have made and asked, “How do you feel?”

His question jolted me back to my senses, and I looked down at my hand.

I had become similar to the dead Seo Dawon–a soul with no body…I looked no different from when I had a physical form, like Seo Dawon, except that my image created no shadow on the ground, and I floated about two centimeters from the floor. I also felt slightly lighter than usual…

“It’s not that bad….” I scratched my cheek and responded honestly.

Seo Dawon, using my body, laughed wickedly. “Then, do you want to continue living like this?”

“Don’t joke about that!”

At my bluster, Dawon said, “Now you’re the servant,” purposefully provoking me.

Though I knew he didn’t truly mean those words, I floated closer– feeling anxious. Seo Dawon squeezed my body’s fists and tapped my legs, scrutinizing my body as if checking something.

“Hmm…In the future, I should make sure to feed you well.” With that aggravating comment, Seo Dawon called out to Lackey who was fidgeting near us. “Hey, Lackey!”

Lackey swung its head around in response to my voice and reached out as if to ask for another hug; it paused in the middle, however, and began staring at me.

I mean…The skeleton was not staring at my body, but right at my soul. Did Lackey even recognize what had happened to me? I was moved and called out to him “Lackey~!”

However, its pause merely indicated that Lackey noticed something amiss rather than fully sensing my soul. Instead of running towards me, Lackey turned to look towards Seo Dawon.

Seeing my pathetic attempt to grab at the skeleton’s attention, Seo Dawon failed to stifle his laughter.

Wow…What’s this? Why am I feeling so betrayed?

[Clack clack clack clack!]

Though it ran closer to Seo Dawon, Lackey continued to hesitate and look back. Seo Dawon confidently approached and lifted Lackey with my hands. And, as if he were teasing, he asked, “Do I look like Lee-kyung?”

[……?!]

As soon as they made eye contact, Lackey, who had previously been quite peaceful, suddenly opened its mouth wide and began to buck and bite at the arms holding it.

I was surprised to see Lackey's wild convulsions and shouted, "Ah! No–Dont!" But, Lackey's agitation would not be so easily appeased.

Seo Dawon, who barely avoided the bite, kept holding and swaying Lackey here and there, provoking the skeleton.

"Hey, you see this, right? It's vicious."

"Put it down! What if I get bitten?!"

"Whatever, this isn't even my body."

"Do you want to die!?"

"How are you going to kill me?" Seo Dawon eventually flipped Lackey around and grabbed it by its vertebrae. He ran to Kim Sangyoon, holding my number one servant as if he were carrying a bag.

Lackey continued to struggle while upside down. Perhaps it was incredibly angry–I could hear the sound of it grinding its teeth fiercely.

I felt sorry for my teased servant, so I casually put my hand on Lackey's head. Surprisingly, the skull felt firm beneath my hands, so I began to stroke it.

I guess I retain my sense of touch even as a spirit…

Or maybe this is a special case because Lackey is my servant?

[Clack Clack!! Clack Clack!!]

Lackey must have also noticed my touch. It placed both its hands on its head and attempted to hold onto my fingers.

My efforts to appease Lackey were in vain, however. When Seo Dawon was close enough to Kim Sangyoon and the battle, he threw Lackey at the pirate birds like it was luggage!

"Hey! Why'd you throw it!" I shouted.

“The crow was about to fly over.”

My heart felt complicated when I confirmed that Seo Dawon was telling the truth. Lackey hit the crow directly and immediately rolled to fight the bird.

Of course I knew that Lackey was a recoverable servant, whether it was thrown or destroyed, but…..

“This kind of behavior is why it bites you!”

You keep on picking fights with it…!

However, Seo Dawon only shrugged at my criticism. Then, with a volume that I couldn’t believe came out of my body, he yelled, “Hey, Kim Sangyoon. Come over here!”

Kim Sangyoon, in the midst of confronting his opponents, looked back in surprise. He then nodded and made a hasty retreat. “What are you going to do now…..?”

The goose, crane, and peacock were closely following the Warrior; they were less than 20 steps away. Seo Dawon smiled at me and said, “I’ll show you the true horror of a Necromancer.”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Smh, MC, the guy’s skills are all gold colored. I’d make the educated guess for gold for fave color.

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Chapter 48

Chapter 48

Seo Dawon summoned Lackey immediately. “Lackey!” It was strange to hear my voice from this third person perspective.

It seemed that [Possession] did not simply allow the Mage to just enter my body but also allowed him to fully use any of my skills without limitation.

Lackey, who was tussling with the crow, was called back to Seo Dawon’s side.

[Clack Clack Clack!]

Lackey, who looked around bewildered, stomped its feet when it saw Seo Dawon. Fortunately, it didn’t rush at the Mage like before. Kim Sangyoon also returned safely to us, albeit with the scent of blood hanging heavily on his battered self. “Gasp…Gasp……I-I thought I was going to die….”

“Sangyoon-ah.”

“Yes?” Kim Sangyoon sputtered, cold sweat rolling down his back. Seo Dawon spoke in a…..how should I describe it…A friendly but chilling voice?

What’s wrong with him? I looked at the two interacting sullenly. Kim Sangyoon was drawn closer to Seo Dawon–wearing my body–as if he were bewitched.

Seo Dawon had even placed my arm around Kim Sangyoon's shoulders. The Warrior had no choice but to bend his knees when Seo Dawon reached up to whisper into his ears.

"Lend me Berserker for a moment." Seo Dawon said.

"Ye……..What?"

"Unequip Berserker and hand it over."

Kim Sangyoon trembled as if he were splashed with cold water. "I-I can't…This is…."

Seo Dawon slapped both his cheeks very weakly. "You're not even using it properly. Let me borrow it for a while, hm?"

"….That……But….."

"Don't you want to hand it over while I'm still feeling nice?"

Eventually, with shaking hands, Kim Sangyoon placed the blood-soaked Berserker in [my] hands.

I flew to Seo Dawon's side. "You…know how to use a sword?" I asked.

Contrary to my expectations, Seo Dawon shook his head.

"Well then, why….."

"Come here, little woodpecker." Seo Dawon called out, interrupting my muttering. He was talking to Lackey, just a few steps away.

I tried to correct him–It's Lackey, not woodpecker!–but Seo Dawon pretended not to hear me and instead brandished the gigantic greatsword. In one fell swoop, he twirled the handle and pounded the blunt edge on Lackey's head.

I immediately felt that it would be useless to insist on proper use of my skeleton's name….Of course, Lackey turned to look at Seo Dawon,

trembling in agitation, but I reached out and attempted to appease him again, “Let’s hold it in, Lackey…..Just this once, be patient….” I begged the skeleton to stay calm.

“Servant, change weapons.” Seo Dawon, amused, barked a [command] that I had never heard before.

Lackey’s current weapon’s status window opened before our very eyes. I had no idea this function existed, and, of course, the default weapon was quite terrible.

[Low-rank Bone Sword]
Type: Sword

Durability: 88
Equipment Level Restriction: 20
Special Skills: None

Description:

A low-quality weapon made out of the bones of the Undead.

Increases skill attacks by +13.

“At this rate, that goose’s sashimi knife would be stronger than this.” Seo Dawon clicked his tongue.

My cheeks flushed red at Seo Dawon’s unimpressed tone.

I didn’t know that I could change Lackey’s equipment for something stronger….! Even to my eyes, Lackey’s original weapon was quite bleak, so

I asked him, “Berserker…Are you going to give that to Lackey?”

“Anything’s better than this…Replace Equipment.” Seo Dawon immediately switched the bone sword with Berserker.

Lackey glanced at the new weapon in its hands and then stared at us. He looked as if he didn’t know what to make of this new sword.

“Now, let’s have our Sangyoon-ie use this bone sword for a while.” Seo Dawon said.

The bone sword was handed off to Kim Sangyoon, whose demeanor seemed vaguely depressed. Seo Dawon passed by him nonchalantly and approached the still motionless Lackey.

In a low voice, he whispered, “Listen to me well when I give orders. If you don’t, you might not be able to see Lee-kyung-ie in this form again in the future.”

Lackey raised its head sharply and looked towards my soul with mournful eye sockets.

It seems Seo Dawon’s no stranger to blackmail…

I clicked my tongue, but I couldn’t tell Lackey to disregard Seo Dawon’s orders. For now, the catastrophe in front of us was a bigger issue.

Though Lackey glared at Seo Dawon–as if he wanted to charge the man and fight to the death–fortunately, that did not happen.

In the meantime, all four birds looked at us gathering our defenses and preparing for battle.

[So, you’re finally coming forward?]

The goose said, offhandedly. It must have been wary of the unknown factor that retreated in the middle of the battle–the probable cause for all the previous lightning damage.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen Owl…I feel sorry for the staff.” Seo talked to himself, ignoring the goose’s pointed remarks. He calmly met the goose’s murderous gaze and held my ghostly hand.

At that moment, something whistled through the air. A feather struck the ground near Seo Dawon’s feet.

It was one of the peacock’s blue feathers.

–Boom!

As soon as it pierced the ground, I heard a momentary ticking noise before the feather exploded like a bomb. Thankfully, Seo Dawon had avoided most of the attack, exercising his reflexes as he quickly stepped back.

As the dust settled, I was a little relieved to see him standing without any injury; Seo Dawon lightly brushed some debris off my dusty hair. “Hey, Kim Sangyoon. Run straight forward,” he ordered.

Kim Sangyoon, who had seemed extra nervous since the peacock feather’s explosion, flinched but did not fail to run out, holding the Bone Sword.

“Lackey, 3 o’clock direction, ‘Rending Cleave.'”

Seo Dawon summoned Lackey in front of him and started barking orders. As soon as it was summoned, Lackey rushed at the crane, who lept for Seo Dawon’s shoulders, and used Berserker’s skill [Rending Cleave] on it.

Involuntarily releasing an ungainly sound, the Crane avoided the bite, but he couldn’t avoid the dagger thrown by Seo Dawon. The second attack penetrated its wings–a perfectly executed time difference attack.

[Kwaaakkk!]

The crane staggered from the pain. Both Seo Dawon and Lackey were relentless in their pursuit.

The problem, however, was that even if the crane's wings were injured, it could deliver powerful blows with its feet. Lackey approached the reeling crane from the back, but the bird suddenly turned around with a spinning kick. Thankfully, Lackey avoided most of it, but the talons grazed past its left shoulder–the non-dominant arm. The shoulder broke, causing the arm to slump and fail to function.

As a skeleton, Lackey seemed to feel no pain, but it was certainly slowed down by this setback. Seo Dawon resummoned Lackey back to his side.

"Lee-kyung-ah, I have a question."

"Yeah?"

"…Something minute like a broken shoulder won't cause Lackey to be reverse summoned, right?"

"Uh…Probably? It's not really a core part. If the jewel inside its skull gets crushed, however, Lackey will get recalled…." As soon as I answered, I regretted it because Seo Dawon immediately broke off Lackey's shoulder and separated its left arm.

Perhaps due to the earlier threats, Lackey flinched but did not otherwise rebel.

Shocked, I shouted, "What are you doing?" However, before Dawon could answer, the crane's skill attack barreled into us first.

[Die!!!]

The crane's spinning kick, like a windmill, tore past so fast that air molecules must have ripped apart. Seo Dawon narrowly dodged and eventually collapsed where he stood.

The crane raised its feet high, triumphantly, and aimed its next stomp at Seo Dawon's neck. Though Seo Dawon rolled and survived, the crane's kick was so fast that it seemed that a proper hit was only a matter of time.

“Lackey!” In the end, Seo Dawon summoned the skeleton again. However, it was significantly more sluggish than the crane due to the missing arm. Lackey couldn’t properly catch up to the crane’s speed.

On the other hand, though the crane had injured its wings, its main skills were centered in its long corded legs. Lackey was unable to properly penetrate the defenses and the bird turned its attention back to Seo Dawon.

The crane returned to its plan of breaking the Mage’s–my–neck. Suddenly, a gruesome, hair-rising sound filled the air.

[Argh, Ahhhhhkkkk!!!]

The crane fell down and screamed; one of its legs was twisted in a bizarre and unnatural direction–completely broken.

And clasped onto the broken crane’s leg was Lackey’s left arm, which Seo Dawon had removed earlier; the skeletal fingers tightened and moved as if it were alive.

I was so shocked to see the arm move separately from the body that I froze for a moment. “T-that’s…How…?”

“Your skeleton’s an undead.” Seo Dawon succinctly said, standing up and dusting himself off. He lifted my foot and stepped on the crane’s face in mockery of the crane’s original plans.

With a poof! a system alarm, [Your level has significantly increased], appeared before my eyes.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Seo Dawon bullies Lackey, and Lackey definitely dislikes Dawon, lmao. What a mess.

I’m planning on uploading two chapters sometime tomorrow or the day after! See you then!

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Chapter 49

Chapter 49

When I leveled up, silver particles swarmed my body–the one that Seo Dawon was still possessing–three times and then disappeared.

As the silver swirls around my body vanished, small lights–a mirror of my own–circled around Lackey and scattered as well.

[……]

Fortunately, Lackey also received a beneficial influence from my level-ups. Its broken shoulder mended and returned to normal. Lackey, testing out its restored body, squeezed and relaxed both its fists multiple times.

Kim Sangyoon, by virtue of being in my party, also partook in the experience rewarded from Seo Dawon's kill. Silver particles also swirled around his body and dissipated; he successfully leveled as well.

When one levels up, the User's physical condition is restored to its best state before the battle, so I could see Kim Sangyoon's complexion brighten. The rosiness of health returned to his cheeks.

Seo Dawon didn't seem to be impressed by the fact that we leveled three times; he simply opened the status window and skimmed the information. "Lackey, come here."

[……..clack clack.]

Lackey's half-beat late reply made me feel that Lackey was reluctant to go near the man. Still, the skeleton was unable to ignore the man's force

and meekly followed his orders–somehow, the sight of its unwilling compliance seemed so pitiful…

Seo Dawon ruthlessly pointed my finger at the half-dented corpse of the crane. “Bite,” he ordered.

He’s going to make Lackey bite something already dead….?

However, Lackey’s response was faster than mine.

Lackey opened its mouth wide, as if it were unhinging its jaw, leaned over the crane, and savagely bit the bird on its neck. Lackey then looked at Seo Dawon, blinking. Its blank face seemed to ask, ‘What do I do now?’

“Make it into a zombie.”

……Ah!

I kept an eye on Lackey, recalling my servant’s forgotten skill.

After hearing Seo Dawon’s order, Lackey began to bite the crane harder, sounding as if it were chewing tough rubber. Soon, a lumpy, amorphous black fog seeped out of Lackey’s back and penetrated the crane’s eye sockets.

The crane’s corpse began to tremble and twitch. Lackey only released the strength from its jaw after it noticed the bird’s convulsions; the skeleton quickly rose to stand by us, watching the corpse with avid interest.

The crane’s eyes rolled up in its sockets and foam came out of its mouth, like a person caught in the throes of a seizure. Soon, the bird began to turn its neck around with a grotesque sound.

I had never used this skill before. Although this skill did indeed turn opponents into a zombie, the process was not as cool as it sounded.

It felt…It felt a bit like watching a zombie in a low-budget horror movie?

However, when the crane raised its body and the broken leg set itself back in its proper position, the bird's poise felt supernatural.

The pirate birds, who have kept a wary distance between us and them, became agitated and slowly walked an invisible border around us. [What's going on?] and [Huh?]–hostile but confused squawks dropped from their beaks. Kim Sangyoon stared with his mouth agape at the crane's resurrection.

"Go." Seo Dawon barked a short order as soon as the crane had fully raised itself upright. The crane shrieked unnaturally and quickly sprinted across the room towards its former comrades.

[Clack clack clack!]

Lackey followed close behind.

The pirate birds were shocked by the zombified crane's approach. With the addition of Lackey, still toting Berserker within its skeletal hands, the birds could no longer assault the party proactively. Instead, they hesitated in between Lackey's sword swings, as if their legs had twisted and tangled together.

Kim Sangyoon did not miss this opportunity; he held the bone sword like a spear and launched it as hard as he could at the crow.

[Argh! It hurts!!]

I had expected for the sword to miss, but it drove through the crow's foot. However, Seo Dawon stopped Kim Sangyoon from approaching the monster, drunk with victory.

"Don't go and come here! Ignore the sword." Seo Dawon said in a thunderous voice.

"Yes……Yes!"

Just as Kim Sangyoon retreated on Seo Dawon's orders, the floor near the crow suddenly exploded. If the Warrior had stepped in to finish off the

weakened crow, he may have gotten caught up in the bombs created by the peacock's feathers.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"About what?"

"That he would have burst if he got near…"

"It's part of these guys' attack patterns."

Pattern….? Even in this chaos, their movements were structured?

Before I could ask Seo Dawon anything else, however, Kim Sangyoon had returned to our side. Kim Sangyoon, breathless and excited, asked, "What did you do to the crane? Is that also another skill?"

"It's a Necromancer skill. Enemies that die by my servant's hand can be made into a zombie."

"Dear God…So you can turn all your dead enemies into zombies…" At Seo Dawon's answer, Kim Sangyoon looked both incredulous and reverent.

"That's a total scam! That Necromancer skill isn't that good!" I shouted to deaf ears.

"Sangyoon-ah," Seo Dawon said.

"Yes?"

"Is it really the appropriate time to address all your questions?"

"Ah….I-I'm sorry…."

Seo Dawon seemed like he was tired of fielding Kim Sangyoon's curiosity–or perhaps he was too lazy to answer more. "After we kill the peacock and the crow, the goose will most likely 'awaken.' From that point on, I'll be marking it." [1]

Kim Sangyoon was shamed by the Mage's blunt dismissal of his questions but still nodded at Seo Dawon's orders. He cautiously asked, "A-Awaken?"

"It's not much, but when a Named monster 'awakens,' it gets larger and faster. And also uses some annoying skills…I'm only going to tell you once, so listen carefully okay?"

"Yes!"

"After awakening, if the goose raises its sashimi knives high above its head and bashes them together twice, it's an impending sign of its [Rigidity] skill. So, when you notice the goose flashing and raising its wings, cover your ears before it finishes."

"Cover…my ears. Got it."

"And every now and then, it'll jump high and dive somewhere close by. When you notice a shadow over your head, immediately roll to your side."

"Ahh…..Yes!" Kim Sangyoon still had no idea that [I] was actually Seo Dawon. As the Mage listed off tips, I could see plain confusion on the Warrior's face, as if he was wondering 'How do you know all of this?' However, Kim Sangyoon did not voice anything and obediently nodded.

Talk was cheap–I wondered if he could truly act on those instructions.

Kim Sangyoon, as if he had heard my thoughts, scratched his head without confidence. "By the way…I don't think I can get the hang of things by just listening to what you've said…"

"Just die then."

"…I'll do my best…"

Of course, Seo Dawon wasn't the type to listen to such weak complaints. Kim Sangyoon had heard the unspoken, "If you die, your corpse will find some use as a zombie," in Seo Dawon's bluntness. The Warrior paled.

[Grr, Grraah….]

[No….!]

In the meantime, the zombified crane and Lackey combination was smoothly dispatching the rest of the pirate birds.

The pirate birds twisted their bodies to escape the grasp of their now terrifying old comrade. After dodging one attack, however, they were met with Lackey’s ruthless persistence–the skeleton slashing with little regard for its own body.

The peacock, still recalling the painful loss of its tail feathers to Lackey’s gaping mouth, could not easily approach the skeleton servant. On the other hand, the crow, whose foot was hurt in an earlier attack, was easily caught by the crane.

[Sq-Squawk! Squawkk!!]

The crow struggled to push the crane off of it. The crane was originally the largest of the poker-playing trio, and the corpse could no longer feel pain as it was now undead. The crane simply continued to try and break its wings.

The crow pecked at the corpse’s eyes, but the crane would not release its hold even as its eyeballs burst.

Lackey did not fall behind either: like a skewer, he ran through the two remaining birds with Berserker.

After struggling to vomit blood, the crow soon dropped. The crane continued to twitch and move, making strange noises.

Choi Lee-kyung-nim’s active use of ‘Lackey’ was amazing! Lackey’s skill proficiency increased greatly.

Lackey immediately retrieved Berserker and slashed through the peacock's left leg, stopping it from saving the crow.

Or course, the peacock made a last-ditch effort to scatter its bomb feathers around it, but, when the dust finally cleared, the only one left standing was Lackey–with Berserker still in hand.

The crane's corpse must have sustained enough damage for it to have lost all mobile function. Its charred body lay prone over the crow's. The peacock had been slashed in half by Berserker.

Lackey was fine except for a few soot marks blackening its bones.

Seeing the disastrous scene, the goose's body began to swell.

In the face of crisis, the 'Goose' will undergo awakening…Alarming signals can be felt from the opponent. Please beware.

And, as Seo Dawon predicted, the battle moved onto the next phase: the goose's awakening.

Footnotes

1. The mechanics that are being discussed here are quite common in some things like MMOs. When certain mobs or add-ons are defeated, a boss can 'awaken.' This can include a proportional increase of strength or even a new phase.

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Chapter 50

Chapter 50

The goose took continuous deep breaths, filling its chest with air. The feathered chest continued to swell, like pumping gas into a balloon.

Damn it, Seo Dawon. How is that only a ‘*little*‘ larger?

The goose had nearly bloated until it looked like it might burst; it was near twice its original size. I couldn’t hide my exasperation.

[Hooo, Hooo……! To think you pushed me to this form…You lot are impressive.]

The goose stepped forward, delivering a line that would not have been out of place on an anime villain. Though its words may have been amusing, we couldn’t afford to underestimate this newly transformed enemy.

Kim Sangyoon looked particularly pitiful–a single sweat droplet dripping down his temple. I reckoned that it was his dismay at the thought of fighting this opponent with a weapon that would fare no better than his bare hands.

Without delay, the goose cracked its neck, once, twice, and rushed at the party.

Kim Sangyoon lifted his bone sword to block the charging goose; the attack was so powerful that Kim Sangyoon, who was quite built, was pushed back, shoes squeaking against the ground.

The goose continued to push at Kim Sangyoon, who had continued to shield himself with the blade. The Warrior had tried to hold out but eventually bent his knees with a groan.

Then, the bird bounced off the sword into the air at a tremendous speed!

“Dodge!” Seo Dawon shouted as soon as he saw the goose bend its knee. Kim Sangyoon briefly paused and rolled to the right as soon as he noticed the shadow hanging over its head.

Boom–!

The goose, who had bounced like a spring, landed in Kim Sangyoon’s original position. Its ankles drove through the floor, but the goose simply shook the rubble off of them, as if it were merely annoyed that the attack missed. The goose straightened its back and lifted its wings up into the air, sashimi knives held high.

The sashimi knives clanked into each other. The sound waves were not visible to the naked eye, but space clearly distorted, spreading out in concentric circles centered on the goose.

Seo Dawon was already standing at the back with both palms covering my ears, but Kim Sangyoon stood stiffly with a pained expression–it seems as if he was unable to defend against the sonic skill in time.

Without skipping a beat, the goose rushed towards Kim Sangyoon again.

[Clack Clack!]

However, Lackey blocked the bird’s path.

Of course, even if Lackey had grown a bit bigger due to the evolution and the level-ups, the skeleton was still only 160 centimeters tall with nothing but bones. My servant helplessly bounced away when the muscle-bound goose shoved it harshly. However, Lackey bought Kim Sangyoon enough time to return to his senses and run away.

“Tch….” The goose clicked its beak, upset that its target escaped.

Kim Sangyoon, Seo Dawon, and Lackey hovered around in a triangular formation with the goose in the center. No one could deal with the goose one-on-one, but Kim Sangyoon and Lackey periodically darted with quick hits to hassle the bird.

While they were buying time, Seo Dawon gathered the ropes that lay around in the room and weaved them together. Then, he kicked at the dead peacock and picked up some exceptionally shiny red feathers.

As soon as Seo Dawon picked them up, a message popped up before my eyes to announce the acquisition of a new item.

[The Bombardier Peacock’s colorful firework feather (Red)]
Type: Bomb

Durability: 30
Equipment Level Restriction: 50
Special Skill: Explosion (Lv. 5)

Description:
A feather-shaped bomb made from the plume of a Bombardier Peacock.

Throw it and blow up where it sticks.

Attack power +7,550

Oh my, isn’t this a weapon? A bomb…..they drop things like this? This isn’t even the reward room…?

[Owl’s Ghost Ship] was a Dungeon famous for its plentiful experience basin; plenty of detailed information had already been released on its routes. I had even raided this place once before. But…this is the first time I’m hearing about this sort of item. I cautiously approached Seo Dawon, who was spinning the feather in his fingers, from the back and asked “This…Is it something we can pick up and use?”

“Yeah. It’s placed here specifically to be utilized by Users.” With those vague words, he threw a feather at one of the perches nailed into the wall.

Boom–!

The sudden commotion drew not only Lackey and Kim Sangyoon’s attention, but the goose’s as well. The perch that Seo Dawon hit with the bomb feather shook and swayed, half its wooden bottom disintegrated.

I thought, ‘No way…is he going to attack the bird by collapsing the half-broken perch on top of it?’ and looked at Seo Dawon. However, the Mage left the swaying perch alone and did not touch it any further. Instead, he pulled at the various rope network that he spread all over the ground. It was clear that he was planning something.

[Do you think this body would really get crushed to death by something like that perch?]

The issue, however, was that Seo Dawon’s behavior was far too conspicuous.

The goose had working eyes; there was no way he wouldn’t notice such suspicious movements on the side…In addition, from its words, it was no stranger to the intricate language of trickery…

As the goose’s prideful boast implied, its awakened form was so huge that the goose would be able to catch and withstand the falling perch with no hardship.

Unfortunately, my predictions were proven true when the ship hit a particularly rough wave. The tilted perch fell down slowly, and the goose

broke it like a stick to flaunt its strength. He flung the shattered pieces onto the floor.

Crash–!

Undeterred, Seo Dawon threw another feather bomb. This time, towards the second perch behind the bird.

The perch, which burst with a bang, collapsed without delay. However, it fell to the side, without even touching the goose, making the explosion seem like a pointless attack.

"…Is there a purpose to knocking down all those perches?"

"Yeah. Ah, it's coming."

The goose traveled underneath the third perch. I wondered if Seo Dawon, who seemed calm, was actually waiting to execute his plan or if he was uncomfortable dealing with two annoyingly curious companions.

Lackey and Kim Sangyoon followed behind, but the two failed to match the speed of the awakened goose. Seo Dawon, however, prioritized flinging the feather bomb at the third perch instead of paying notice to the bird stomping–running violently–at him.

With a bang, the third perch began to tilt. The goose jumped lightly over the falling perch and reached towards Seo Dawon!

"Lackey!" Just then, Seo Dawon summoned Lackey into his embrace.

Lackey reflexively bit the goose's extended wing; the goose swung its bitten limb and flung the skeleton soldier away from it.

Lackey flew through the air and landed on the last perch in the room! The collision created a deafening crash as if another bomb had detonated, and the last perch was perfectly destroyed.

Did Seo Dawon attach a feather to Lackey when he summoned it?

But…It was good that the last perch was destroyed and all…but, after flinging Lackey away, there really was nothing in between the monstrous bird and my possessed body.

The goose cast a huge shadow over us, spewing incredible bloodlust.

I trusted Seo Dawon…but, when I saw its muscled wingtips, I could only imagine my body squished like a can of beer in its grasp. I involuntarily screamed, “No!!!”

Event Scenario – You have achieved ‘Tremendous noise’ which triggers ‘Owl’s Insomnia.’ Boss monster ‘Owl’ is soon arriving…

Simultaneously, the goose stopped moving. A special effect, which usually heralded the dungeon’s [Boss Monster]’s presence, filled the room.

And the goose…..

[N-no! Owl-nim! I can handle this!]

Watching the swirling magic circle–where the boss would appear–the goose panicked, grabbed its head, and screamed.

After a moment, it soon wrapped its beak with both wings and buried its head between its thighs, trembling,as if making a sound would result in its death.

Seo Dawon threw the remaining feather bomb straight at the bird. Since the goose had bowed its head and trembled in fear, it had not noticed the feather piercing the ground right below its feet. With a loud bang, the bird was flung into the air from the impact.

Your level has greatly increased!

With the goose's anticlimactic death, the level-up message was repeated five times. Seo Dawon immediately brought up the [Party] status window and pressed for a long while on party member [Kim Sangyoon] button.

Would you like to expel 'Kim Sangyoon' from the party?

I watched in disbelief as Seo Dawon pressed [Yes].

As soon as Seo Dawon pressed his confirmation, Kim Sangyoon, who had stared at the boss monster spawn point while nervously holding his sword, suddenly disappeared.

The party has been dissolved…Would you like to abandon your current raid?

And, following Kim Sangyoon’s disappearance, Seo Dawon pressed [Yes] again.

At the same time, a giant owl-shaped boss fluttered into existence… However, the scene soon faded into darkness; I couldn’t withstand vertigo that flooded over me and closed my eyes. When I opened them again, we had left [Owl’s Ghost Ship] and instead stood in the middle of the Hub’s open space–an area that received a lot of User traffic.

“W-What?” Still gripping the old Bone Sword, Kim Sangyoon stood with a puzzled look on his face and grabbed my body by the shoulders. “But Why…We didn’t defeat the boss!”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Thanks for Areli for the Kofi for this bonus chapter >.<

Smh Kim Sangyoon, you had one job…

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Chapter 51 - reupload

Chapter 51

TN: So, footnotes don’t seem to be working for this chapter…so the notes are intext for this chapter! I’ll be back to footnotes later!

I only noticed after Kim Sangyoon grabbed me roughly, but I realized I returned to my own body.

I guess the [Possession] mode expired?

Instead of shaking him off, I grabbed my forehead. “I’m d i z z y…..”

Kim Sangyoon quickly released me, as if he had been burned. “Ah! This isn’t….I….” He said, flustered.

I frowned at Kim Sangyoon, once again acting quite badly, “I’ll. tell. you. everything. later.” Upholding the pretense of being an all-knowing User was so difficult.

Honestly, I was also embarrassed by Seo Dawon’s sudden actions. If I could, I would also grab Seo Dawon’s shoulder–like Kim Sangyoon did to me–and shake him while asking him to explain his thought process…

If it weren’t for the prying eyes that surrounded us……When I turned around to look for Seo Dawon, I saw him crouched next to Lackey with an evil smile. He was busy pressing on its forehead, teasing the skeleton. My heart broke for Lackey, but I held in my annoyance and approached the Mage.

[–Clack! Clack!]

Lackey was so stressed out by Seo Dawon's teasing that it released a grumbling noise that I had never heard since I first summoned the skeleton. It gnashed its teeth at its opponent.

Seo Dawon, on the other hand, called to Lackey like a dog. "Lackey! Come over here."

Just in case, I checked its **[current mood]: [I'm going to kill you!]**– Lackey was in complete outrage. I stared at Seo Dawon, trying to impress upon him that he shouldn't tease Lackey so much, but he shrugged as if to ask what he had done wrong.

Tired, I stopped glaring at the Mage and gathered the sulking skeleton in my arms. I pulled at Kim Sangyoon's thick forearms, distracting him from his despondency.

Since we were in front of a famous Dungeon, there was constant, fluid traffic of Users. Sure enough, when our party suddenly appeared embarrassing gossip began to spread amongst the present voyeurs.

Usually, if a Dungeon raid succeeds, a party would appear with the target time displayed as an alarm in the [User Alert] app. Therefore, if a party returned without that notification, their failure would be publicly advertised and they could easily become the target of unwanted attention.

"Huh? It can't be…emergency escape?"

"But that red hair…Isn't that Kim Sangyoon?"

Additionally, Kim Sangyoon was such a famous influencer…

The biggest problem arose, however, when we avoided their gazes and ducked into the alleyway headed for the Hub's downtown.

"Oh? Sangyoon-ie?" By fortuitous–or rather ill-fated–timing, the door to a small alchemist workshop opened as we passed by. A group of large men

poured out…Among them, the greasy-looking blond man at the forefront raised his hand and greeted Kim Sangyoon.

Standing next to him, I noticed that Kim Sangyoon's expression hardened as soon as he heard the voice, but, when he turned around, I couldn't find any traces of such displeasure on his face.

Kim Sangyoon replied in a startlingly polite manner, "Oh, Hyung-nim. What are you doing here?" His cordial demeanor was impeccable. The blonde man walked closer to us to deliver his answer.

I could feel his light brown eyes scan me up and down; unconsciously, I straightened my back. I had only just met his eyes, but somehow I already felt repulsed.

"Who's this, next to you? He's someone I've never seen before in Sangyoon-ie's party?"

"Ah, this person is…."

"Are you a support?" (TN: Just in case someone doesn't know, a support character in an MMO usually is someone that buffs and heals the others.) The blonde man began guessing at my class, gauging my slender physique. He quickly erased all suspicious scrutiny from his expression and reached a hand out to me with a smile. "Hello. I'm a Warrior affiliated with [HaHae]. I'm called Ahn Joosung."

I finally understood the tenuous atmosphere that existed between Kim Sangyoon and this man once I heard his name. Wasn't Ahn Joosung–the third generation chaebol–the man that made Kim Sangyoon grit his teeth? (TN: Chaebol is basically a rich heir to a family business.)

"Ah, so this is Ahn Joosung?" Seo Dawon, who followed us quietly, perked up at the familiar name and rushed to observe Ahn Joosung's face. He stared closely at the man, his nose almost touching the other's.

Instead of passing on, Seo Dawon observed his face for quite some time. He muttered to himself, "Did Ahn Joosung have any brothers?"

As I was distracted by Seo Dawon, I did not notice the suddenly chilling atmosphere. Ahn Joosung had stuck out his hand for a handshake and an introduction, but I was busy staring at his face (because Seo Dawon was there) and didn't return his greeting.

"Um. I'm…Choi Lee-kyung…" I hurriedly grabbed at his hand, hoping to pass this interaction with only my name… As soon as I tried to pull my hand away, Ahn Joosung held onto my fingertips firmly, but not painfully, and would not let me go.

What's going on? Even though I gave him a vaguely uncomfortable look, Ahn Joosung still held onto my hands and asked, with a smile, "What's your guild? What class are you…"

I was speechless–I could only move my lips ineffectively.

Kim Sangyoon, noticing my discomfort, stepped forward. "Hyung-nim. That's…Lee-kyung-nim is…."

"Did I ask you?"

"……"

Once again we were quickly plunged into sub-zero atmosphere.

Ahn Joosung did not hide his disregard for Kim Sangyoon, and Kim Sangyoon's polite smile, which he had struggled to maintain, soon collapsed. He looked at Ahn Joosung without much of an expression but didn't attempt to make any other statements.

"……"

My insides boiled at the disrespect and cockiness that Ahn Joosung showed. Come to think of it, though, Kim Sangyoon was a bully when we met for the first time as well…Is this a characteristic of Warriors?

"….I'm a Necromancer."

"A Necromancer?"

“Yes.” Regardless of my boiling heart, I pressed down my anger and answered cordially. I don’t have anything to gain from clashing with this man.

When he heard my answer, however, Ahn Joosung’s face distorted, as if he were holding back laughter. “Really? Hahaha. You definitely fit well with Kim Sangyoon.”

This bastard had a knack for making two people feel filthy with one sentence.

Kim Sangyoon couldn’t stand the insult so he opened his mouth, but, just in time, Ahn Joosung interrupted, “Come on now, relax. It’s just a joke?” He grinned. This time, he ignored me and turned towards Kim Sangyoon. “Sangyoon-ie! Are you still holding grudges since last time? When I didn’t call you in time for the boss? I hear you’ve been spitting curses about me.”

“……Me?”

“Yeah, you punk. How many times did I say I was sorry? I couldn’t sleep from how much my ears were tickled.” (TN: That is to say, he couldn’t sleep from how many rumors reached his ears, aka ‘tickled’ them.)

As if they were close friends, Ahn Joosung smiled and slung an arm over Kim Sangyoon’s shoulder. Kim Sangyoon couldn’t reject his skinship but showed his anger by stiffly crossing his arms and making an unhappy expression.

Or course, Ahn Joosung knew the best ways to rile the Warrior up. He teased, “That’s why I said this Hyung will buy you a drink…Let’s grab drinks, on me, and let go of this issue. Okay?”

Profit from successful raids could be in the billions of wons…And he’s planning on appeasing that with one drink? Without an apology? Is he fucking with Kim Sangyoon?

He turned back towards me, who was standing awkwardly apart from the feuding Warriors, and said “Necromancer hyung-nim should also come along.”

Kim Sangyoon was not ignorant of the insulting nature of his offer.

“You’re replacing the last hit on the boss…with a single drink?” Kim Sangyoon flushed red. His voice teetered between rational thought and angry disbelief. (TN: = Last hit. It’s often used in games like League of Legends or Dota, where getting the last hit on a monster will net you the full reward.)

However, Ahn Joosung aggravatingly patted Kim Sangyoon’s head. “Well then, what can I do? Shall I beg?”

When Ahn Joosung said, “Shall I beg,” his cloying smile wiped off his face. The remaining expression showed contempt as if he were saying, ‘What can you even do?’……Kim Sangyoon clenched his fist so tightly that the joints on his fingers turned white. However, he stayed silent, unable to return the abuse.

Ahn Joosung watched Kim Sangyoon shake and lowered his voice. “Let’s not be a nuisance. Do you want Hyung to take care of things later?”

“…….”

He then lightly pushed Kim Sangyoon away, looked back towards me, and opened his mouth to say his greetings. However, he smirked and turned away without even that last show of manners. Ahn Joosung rejoined his group, who were standing a few steps away with their arms crossed. They laughed as they walked away.

I looked at Kim Sangyoon who looked positively miserable. When Ahn Joosung and his group were dots on the horizon, I carefully stroked his back, trying to comfort him.

Although, I’m honestly not in the position to comfort anyone as I’ve been ignored and underestimated just as much as Kim Sangyoon in this

situation…

Maybe I feel emboldened because I saw Seo Dawon's fierce smile darkening every time Ahn Joosung had disrespected me? In any case, I don't know about Bae Jaemin, but I could definitely kill Ahn Joosung with Seo Dawon's help…It's a bit morbid to think this way, but I was relieved to finally have a feasible target–one that we could dispatch quickly…

Kim Sangyoon was recently tortured by Seo Dawon, and, just now, his old enemy Ahn Joosung had provoked him…Regardless of my other feelings for the man, I felt sympathetic pity on a human level.

"Knnnrk!"

Ridiculously, as soon as I patted him on the back, he made a strange sound; his back shivered as if experiencing a mini seizure. He looked at me with more wariness than when he looked at Ahn Joosung.

I felt that I didn't deserve such a guarded gaze, so I asked, "W-Why…?"

Seo Dawon enlightened me. "Giving him a 'reward' because you felt bad for him? How kind of you…." he giggled.

TN: SO Sorry for the mix up you guys! Hopefully this chapter fixes everything!

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Chapter 52

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Wait, ‘reward’ was also invoked in this way?

I hurried to him in embarrassment and shouted, “That’s not what I meant!”

Kim Sangyoon, after hearing my hasty voice, scratched his head and said, “I know!” He turned away from me.

But, why do you keep moving away if you ‘*know*‘…..? It makes it feel like I’m somehow sexually harassing Kim Sangyoon! Seo Dawon was busy laughing at my embarrassed and frustrated expression.

Unfair!

See, that’s why you keep getting bitten by Lackey…!

Thankfully, as time passed, Kim Sangyoon seemed to calm down and his rosy complexion returned as he rubbed his back. However, he stiffened when he saw me move. Therefore, I maintained a certain distance from him as we stumbled out of the alley.

I walked in front of Kim Sangyoon; when someone poked me in the back, I turned around in surprise.

It was Seo Dawon. “Just listen to me.”

“…..”

When I suddenly looked back, Kim Sangyoon simultaneously stopped his steps–faster than a bolt of lightning. I shrugged to indicate that there was nothing important and turned my head away.

Seo Dawon, who quietly floated behind me, continued, “The boss is too much for you at your standard.”

Finally, he’s explaining why we escaped the Dungeon without finishing the boss battle…I was briefly furious at the words “your standard,” but, when I recalled the battle situation, I couldn’t refute that blunt assessment. I closed my mouth and nodded.

Honestly, we struggled to defeat the named monster, the goose. Without Seo Dawon, Kim Sangyoon or I may have been seriously injured or killed.

“How regretful. If we had gotten to the reward room, we could have summoned Garam-ie today……It can’t be helped. Tomorrow, we’re going to go through the same motions and not defeat the boss again. You should explain the plan to Kim Sangyoon.” Seo Dawon pointed at the Warrior with his chin.

I scratched my cheek a little and called to him, “Sangyoon-ssi…”

“Yes?”

“Tomorrow, we’re going to proceed with the raid in the same exact way. We’re going to skip the boss as well.”

“Tomorrow? We’re not going to rest and go right away?” Kim Sangyoon’s teary eyes widened.

Dungeons are places where Users gain rewards and level-ups by killing monsters. On average, Users took at least one day off after each trip.

Since one’s life depended on their condition, it was common to not overdo it and strain themselves. However, Seo Dawon snorted at Kim Sangyoon’s argument, tone dripping with sarcasm, “He wants to rest at his level?”

I let Seo Dawon words flow from my ears through my mouth. “Since we’re not catching the boss and following the same path…It’ll probably be easier than today,” I replied.

“If we don’t defeat the boss…aren’t we at a loss?” Kim Sangyoon replied with a glum voice.

Most Users enter Dungeons because of the end of raid rewards. If you give up on the boss and only receive experience from the monsters, the User will sustain massive losses. Potion prices…Fixing the durability of weapons and armors for Warriors–the repair costs alone may stack up to at least 1 million won…

“….Well, I think the boss might be too much for the two of us,” I explained the situation, paraphrasing Seo Dawon’s words.

Kim Sangyoon must have also agreed. “Ah….” he said, in downtrodden acceptance.

Kim Sangyoon lowered his volume and asked, “Excuse me, but that person…Isn’t he going to join us? Seo…That person could easily handle the boss if he comes with us…Wouldn’t it be better to clear the whole raid with his help?”

He couldn’t utter Seo Dawon’s name, wary of his surroundings. In summary, he was asking if Seo Dawon could ‘carry’ us.

Of course, I also felt the same, but that situation was impossible. I wouldn’t be able to level up since Seo Dawon and I didn’t share experience pools.

Since the summoning time was restricted to 30 minutes, Lackey and I could be left alone, stranded without any help…Of course, Kim Sangyoon had no knowledge of any of these extenuating circumstances.

At my hesitation, Seo Dawon suggested, “Say that I’m busy.”

“…Seo Dawon-ssi has other things to do. For the time being, he won’t be able to accompany us to the Dungeons.”

“…I understand.”

After agreeing to meet each other at the same time and in front of the same Dungeon, we separated to return to our own accommodations.

Honestly, seeing Kim Sangyoon’s back moving further away reminded me of the catastrophe this morning. I briefly wondered if he might betray us again…But, noticing my worries, Seo Dawon assured me, “It’ll be fine.”

So, I decided to pack away my conflicting thoughts.

* * *

After returning home, I washed up and ate a quick dinner.

While I was eating, Seo Dawon searched “Ahn Joosung ” on my cell phone. He must have found something important because he sent a text to some unknown number.

Afterwards, he turned towards me–a bystander to his research–and asked a random question. “How was today?”

“Huh?”

“This much is doable, right?”

Looking back on all the events, I pondered on Seo Dawon’s query.

Was it doable…..

Honestly, regardless of whether or not something was feasible, I contributed nothing to the raid in the dungeon today–I only moved as Seo

Dawon had commanded.

“If you’re asking me if I’m tired, I’m not…But I really didn’t do much today…”

Actually, it wasn’t just today…Ever since we met, I felt like every moment I was simply dragged into his pace.

However, Seo Dawon laughed, “When you get a honeycomb, you should suck all the honey out of it.” [1] He then sobered slightly, “Tomorrow, I won’t intervene too much.”

“You’re saying I just have to follow along the footsteps you laid today?”

“Yeah. What I did earlier was the fastest method to neutralize the goose.”

When I asked what he meant, Seo Dawon explained that a Dungeon may contain countless scenarios. By identifying certain behaviors or patterns, we can manipulate the conditions to call forth scenarios that would be in our favor.

For example, in the case of [Owl’s Ghost Ship], if a party moved without removing the sparrow from the watchtower, the [clumsy invader] condition would be triggered. That will lead to a more ferocious boss battle than in other scenarios.

That’s why if a party can find the most efficient scenarios that match their member composition, the time taken to successfully raid the Dungeon can be reduced, and dangerous situations can be controlled.

“Why don’t I know anything about this?” I felt like a fool while listening to Seo Dawon’s explanation. Like an idiot, I grinded hard at various early Dungeons without knowing the deeper mechanics.

In fact, when I visited the [Owl’s Ghost Ship] with the other party, I followed the orders of the party leader to the dot, but I had no idea why I was told to act a certain way.

Of course, I made a lot of mistakes because I simply moved around according to my memorizations instead of a deeper understanding of the party's plan of action….No, I think I didn't even wonder about the 'why's and 'how's behind the intricate strategy…

"I guess you couldn't care less because you were in a hurry to survive? I'm not being sarcastic…exploration is only possible to those that can afford it. I haven't done much research into various 'scenario calling' methods either." Seo Dawon said kindly, as if to not discourage me.

Then, he explained an organized itinerary of his movements–why he gave such instructions–and described today's battles, one by one.

Listening to his explanation made me feel like he was the creator of this Dungeon and its scenarios. "Rankers sure are different," I said, admiringly. "So to reiterate, you threw all those ropes on the ground to slow down the goose?"

"Yeah. And there's a probability that the goose will trip as well. If you don't untie the ropes, they might also support the perches when they're supposed to fall down. At that point, it's a bit of a hassle to cut away at them with a knife."

"Ahhh…." I listened quietly before asking, "Can I write this down?"

Seo Dawon was willing to wait. However, though he never once disdained me while explaining the Dungeon mechanics, when I went around looking for a pen and notepad, he teased, "What are you doing with your cell phone then?" I felt embarrassed and sat down with the phone, transcribing what he had said previously.

Then, he said, "Now that I've explained it to you like this…I'll curse you if you make a mistake, got it?" He didn't laugh, but he added, generously, "Although, how could you possibly do well in your first try." His actions softened the bluntness of his words.

So, I felt emboldened by his kindness and asked about the things I didn't quite understand with his first explanation. Seo Dawon indulged me in my

curiosity for two or so hours

TL: Sorry for the fiasco yesterday~

Additionally: If people are interested in being a backup proofreader (PROs – You get to read my large stockpile of chapters and hear me squeal about the novel. CON – you have to hear me squeal about the novel) Give me a DM or @ me in the foxaholic discord!

Footnotes

1. This is essentially, “don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.” Basically, when you receive something good, you should milk it for all its worth. I wanted to keep the original imagery of the words used, so this is a literal translation of an idiom.

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Chapter 53

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The next day arrived.

"……Sangyoon-ssi?" I had left home a little earlier than agreed, but when I arrived, the redhead had already been waiting for who knows how long.

When I called his name, he looked at me with his face an absolute mess. In particular, I was surprised by the dark circles that surrounded his eyes.

"Why is your face…Why do you look so emaciated?"

"….." Kim Sangyoon opened his mouth as if he were about to say something but suddenly thought better of it. "Ah, No. It's nothing. I'm fine!" With militaristic discipline, he took the lead of our party.

I asked Seo Dawon, "Is it okay if he's like that?"

Coincidentally, Seo Dawon had a strange expression as he stared at Kim Sangyoon.

How should I say this…He exuded the same aura as the Senior who would often harass me in the past? I only had a hunch–one that I barely believed–so I carefully probed, "Why does Kim Sangyoon look so haggard?…. Do you know anything about that?"

"What about Kim Sangyoon?" Seo Dawon feigned ignorance, but the corners of his lips pulled up.

I asked him, alarmed, “You didn’t beat him up yesterday, right?”

Seo Dawon looked down at me, mockingly disappointed. “Who do you think I am….?” Then, with a contemplative expression on his face, he said, “Actually, it’s the opposite. I’ve done him a great favor.”

“A favor?”

Would a person who’s received a great favor become only skin and bones in a single day….?

However, Seo Dawon had the audacity to nod. “I’ve allowed even a shabby punk like him to do his part. About Kim Sangyoon…He surprisingly has a natural talent.” He added a rare compliment at the end of his scathing dismissal.

“Huh?”

“It’s just that his brain can’t keep up with that talent. He’s especially bad with multitasking and can’t do anything without support. He didn’t really do anything yesterday.”

“Ah…..”

Is that right?

Well, recalling yesterday’s raid, I guess Kim Sangyoon didn’t do anything particularly impressive in the Dungeon. He didn’t even seem to be able to use the new skill that Seo Dawon had given him either… But I didn’t really do anything yesterday either, so I had no justification to throw stones at his performance.

However, it seemed that Seo Dawon was exceedingly frustrated with the Warrior. Did he take some ‘*special*‘ measures yesterday because of his annoyance? From the look on Kim Sangyoon’s face, it doesn’t seem as if he received a patient theory class as I did, yesterday…

“Since I taught him ‘well,’ let’s keep an eye on him today.” Seo Dawon was half a beat faster than me and steered my curiosity away from the poor

Warrior. Eventually, I abandoned my questions to prepare as Kim Sangyoon and I created a party and entered [Owl’s Ghost Ship].

“Chest Slash!”

I was truly surprised.

Kim Sangyoon demonstrated a completely different grace from his clumsiness yesterday.

We entered the food storage room with the poker-playing birds–just like yesterday–but Kim Sangyoon quickly smashed the poker table and lightly attacked two of the birds that escaped in surprise. After driving the two away, he fell back to my side and began engaging one of the birds in battle.

It had only been a day, but, unlike the previous helplessness that he displayed, he predictively stepped to avoid the crane’s attack. In 15 minutes, he sent its neck flying. At the same time, he dug his blade into the charging crow’s embrace and shouted ‘Buster Blade,’ showcasing his new skill.

As soon as he used the skill, Berserker’s sword blade was covered in a reddish aura that began to burn violently.

The crow defensively stuck its wings forward to prevent Kim Sangyoon from further burrowing his sword into its torso. At that point, the crow’s blue-tinged wings successfully blocked the blade.

However, when the [Buster Blade] skill was finally executed, the blocking wings were easily sliced into pieces. Soon, fragments of the crow’s corpse rolled around on the floor.

“T-that’s unbelievable…” I couldn’t stop my gaping mouth from hanging open as I watched his transformation.

Seo Dawon snorted, “He’s at least pulling one person’s worth in weight now.” [1]

Even when the goose appeared, later on, the situation still felt relatively relaxed as Kim Sangyoon countered its attacks. So, Lackey and I were able to focus on destroying the perches–to trigger the ‘scenario.’

The goose boss battle yesterday took three hours; with Sangyoon’s great performance, though, the time was successfully reduced to 50 minutes!

Event Scenario – You have achieved ‘Tremendous noise’ which triggers ‘Owl’s Insomnia.’ Boss monster ‘Owl’ is soon arriving…

If Seo Dawon borrowed my body through [Possession] to finish off the goose yesterday, then today Kim Sangyoon finished the monster by slashing it from behind.

To be honest, Kim Sangyoon was so cool at that moment that I could ignore the goose’s blood that splattered all over his weapon and body.

But, after finishing in such a cool manner, as soon as our eyes met Kim Sangyoon’s expressionless face turned timid.

He rushed to my side and began to offer pitiful excuses, “I-I couldn’t finish this in forty minutes…’

That he was in a bad condition after staying awake all night…That the goose had awoken five minutes earlier than he had predicted…Later, he began to speak faster and faster until all his words blended into an unintelligible mess. Bewildered, I looked at Seo Dawon who simply shrugged back at me.

What a spiteful gesture–it indicated that he had no desire to explain anything.

Instead, I grabbed Kim Sangyoon’s arm and said, “That’s enough. You did well. Since the boss is here…Let’s get out.” I expelled him from the party.

The party has been dissolved…Do you want to use the ’emergency escape kit’?

Again, I used an escape kit to leave the Dungeon.

As soon as I stepped outside, I couldn’t see Kim Sangyoon, who had left the Dungeon first.

What’s this? He appeared right next to me yesterday…It takes less than a minute to follow after him. Did he leave first?

Confused, I looked around for him. Seo Dawon said, “There he is,” pointing out Kim Sangyoon sitting in an alley a little ways away from the Dungeon.

What’s this? Why is he like this? Is he injured somewhere?

I ran towards Kim Sangyoon, searching for wounds, but as soon as I approached him, he jumped up, covered his face, and shook his hands in front of him. “P-please don’t come near!”

“…What’s wrong?”

However, he didn’t answer; I noticed that his uncovered ears flushed bright red. Was this the fault of the ‘vow of submission’ again?

Honestly, this was really annoying…Why are the conditions so trigger-happy? Shouldn't the contract only deliver the 'reward' when I wish it? In the future, will we continue to have scuffles due to this imprecise vow?

As I angrily contemplated, Kim Sangyoon slowly lowered his hands.

To my surprise, his face was a little wet, as if he had been crying. For a man of his stature and striking appearance to be brought low like this…I stared, fascinated, at how small he seemed.

Kim Sangyoon seemed to have noticed that I was underestimating him.

Suddenly, he frowned and pushed me against the wall, locking me in between his arms. His muscles threatened me–dared me to see him as an easy opponent.

If it were just a few days ago, I would have been fairly scared at his efforts to intimidate me…

But, Kim Sangyoon couldn't even look me in the eye as he pushed me against the wall. Regardless of his size, his fragile expression made him feel weak.

"What are you doing?" So, even as I was trapped in Kim Sangyoon's arms, I calmly spoke without trembling or wavering.

Kim Sangyoon also seemed to instinctively know that he started on the wrong step. Eventually, he slowly removed his huge cauldron-like hands from my face and tearfully said, "S-stop it. Damn it…..I'm not a pervert…."

His curse didn't have a bite. When I heard the word, 'pervert' or whatever, I casually looked at his leg in shock.

This–!! He's crazy!

I suddenly also felt shy and raised my gaze high in the air. "Ahem…." I cleared my throat.

Wait a minute, so whenever I tried to extend a friendly gesture or told him how well he did…he got…stiff….like this?

Damn it, what kind of ‘reward’ is this?

I now understood why Kim Sangyoon convulsed whenever I touched him…..Are you insane, Seo Dawon?

“Excuse me…This wasn’t what I had intended.” I comforted Kim Sangyoon while glaring at Seo Dawon.

However, Seo Dawon also denied my suspicions. “Hey, this isn’t what I intended either!”

“The ‘reward’ induces powerful feelings of happiness or pleasure…it shouldn’t cause erections.”

“…….”

TL: Thanks for reading~ (No upload tomorrow, probably, but I’ll be back afterwards!) I’m as horrified as MC tbh. When I was translating I was like… “Oh no. is this ‘stiff,’ what I think it is…..???”

Footnotes

1. The original said that he’s now ‘one serving’ as in serving size in food. Aka, he’s ‘enough’ for one person, skill-wise. I just found the English equivalent for the saying.

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Chapter 54

Chapter 54

TL: I decided to change “low-grade” necromancer to “junior necromancer” in the following chapters! I felt that low-grade is a term best used for objects, not classes.

Then what’s the problem!

The glint of my eyes beseeched for Seo Dawon to clear up this false accusation.

“In the first place, it’s a modified contract that we made for taming monsters. Do you think we’d be crazy to add in something like that?” Seo Dawon said.

Conscious of Kim Sangyoon, who continued to bow his head, I mouthed, ‘Then what on earth?’

Seo Dawon stroked his chin and contemplated, “Monsters are like beasts, so they feel safe and happy when they’re around their owners and their bellies are full. But humans all have different ideas about what counts as a ‘good’ feeling… Doesn’t that mean this is just Kim Sangyoon’s taste?”

Then, does that mean Kim Sangyoon’s favorite pleasant sensation is se–…..Umm…..Something in the erotic sphere?

Ah…Then what should I do about this?

As the person who unintentionally contributed to Kim Sangyoon’s humiliation, I hesitated. I wasn’t sure whether or not I should apologize or make him understand the situation and my perspective.

Seo Dawon spoke by my side, “But is that enough to drive him to tears? I was going to immediately kill him but I was patient and let him live…”

How self-centered…

Kim Sangyoon is obviously a macho man. Such a person has been subjected to this weird obedience by me, someone small enough to be no match for his fists. His mental state may be unable to endure and break… Though, I was surprised that Kim Sangyoon was such a delicate human being to cry over something like this.

So I waited for Kim Sangyoon to calm down (in both ways) before trying to engage him again. “Excuse me…Sangyoon-ssi.”

“That’s…Originally the contract was used for taming monsters…I think it’s having some unintended side effects.” While I insisted that his bodily reactions were something I never desired, I couldn’t bring myself to pin the blame on the Warrior’s preferences, like Seo Dawon had said, either.

Kim Sangyoon peered up at the sky and recollected his hold on reality. After a while, he turned his attention back to me and asked, “…Then. How long until I can be released from this contract?” [1]

“Maybe he should get used to it. Or learn to enjoy it.” Seo Dawon sarcastically said. He seemed to find some form of amusement in Kim Sangyoon’s mental distress.

I ignored his words and replied, “Once we’re sure Sangyoon-ssi won’t betray us, I’ll release you.”

To be honest, from my position, I couldn’t really say much to him other than I’m sorry that both ‘reward’ and ‘punishment’ have become so painful for him. However, I couldn’t control his behavior without this contract…

Of course, my words would have sounded so vague to him. How can one quantify such ambiguous criteria as ‘confidence that you won’t betray.’

‘…..Ah!’ As soon as I thought that, a good idea popped into my head. Without delay, I manifested the ‘vow of submission’ Kim Sangyoon signed and unfurled it between us.

“Truthfully…There’s no trust between us, right? I don’t think it’ll be easy for me to have faith in Sangyoon-ssi’s future actions; on the other hand, I don’t think Sangyoon-ssi has faith that I’ll release him from this binding contract,” I began.

“…..That’s right.”

“So, I’m going to write an ‘additional clause’ at the end of this contract that clearly delineates the conditions that would terminate this agreement.”

Kim Sangyoon looked between the floating red parchment and me, eyes darting to and fro.

As for me, I looked at Seo Dawon, who looked intrigued. I paused until I was sure he wouldn’t intervene, “On the day Bae Jaemin dies, this contract will be terminated.”

Kim Sangyoon stiffened, but, when I changed the parchment to reflect my new terms, he did not hesitate to agree to the additional clause.

Originally, he betrayed us in order to endear himself to Bae Jaemin–but that was just a purely selfish decision. He had no special loyalty to the ranker.

Like that, the matter of the contract had ended without a hitch.

* * *

After updating the contract with Kim Sangyoon, Seo Dawon and I returned back home and gathered in the living room.

I had briefly forgotten–because of Kim Sangyoon’s ordeal–that I achieved my goal of reaching level 65 through power-leveling in [Owl’s Ghost Ship]. Yesterday I had leveled 7 times and today I gained 4: in total, that’s 66 levels.

My status window now displayed the following information.

Name: Choi Lee-kyung – Lv 66
Class: Junior Necromancer

HP: 101,000
MP: 38,775

Title: Greenhorn Adventurer – tasting the bitterness of life!
(While using the title 'Greenhorn Adventurer', movement speed will increase by 5%)

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):

Magic: 778
Magic control: 4.9%
Movement Speed: 22.7% (+5%)

Skill
– Summon evil spirits

[Summon vengeful ghosts: Proficiency 100%, Rank: Intermediate]
[Summon sacrificial offering: Proficiency 0.7%, Rank: Lowest Grade]

You can summon evil spirits through contracts to have them serve as your servants.

***If the ability of the servant is far superior to that of the summoner, a penalty may be sustained to properly maintain the contract.**

There are two types of contracts: Vengeful ghost summoning and Sacrificial offering summoning. Pressing the button for each summoning skill will start the technique.

– Low-rank skeleton Summon (1/1)
Name of the skeleton (Lackey)

The initial registration of a name in the skill above cannot be later changed. You can summon without any restrictions, even if you are far

away from your summoned spirit, if you call their name. (Cooldown time 1 minute 30 seconds).

– Command Servants
Current number of commandable beings: (1/2)

(‘Lackey’ currently has two main skills available.)

–Possession
If special conditions are met, the servant can use the summoner’s body.

– A new servant ‘Seo Dawon’ has been added.
(‘Seo Dawon’ Currently has 115 main skills, 33 auxiliary skills, 25 summons, and 3 powerful combat magic finishers. However, due to the difference between the level of servant and summoner, all skill attack power has been significantly reduced and certain skills are currently unavailable.)

Underneath the status window, there was a new, blinking [!] exclamation mark icon. When I pressed my fingers to it, the [Essence of Vengeful Ghosts] all aligned in a circle before me.

You can now use an ‘Essence of a Vengeful Ghost.’ Please select the essence you want to sign into a contract. *However, if the vengeful ghost refuses the contract, the essence will be destroyed and the Vengeful Ghost Contract cannot proceed

Unlike before, I was able to scan the information contained within these essences.

In the past, each of these black wedges looked the same, and even when I held them, nothing was marked on the surface nor in the system. I couldn’t tell who was who. But now that I passed level 65, the item information was automatically updated to include whose vengeful soul each essence contained.

I held each soul in my hand, one by one, until–at the fourth black wedge–the message [You’ve acquired ‘Essence of a Vengeful Ghost’ –

‘Jung Garam’!] popped up.

I held it in my hand and looked towards Seo Dawon, “I found it.”

“Shall we get started?”

[Clack Clack!]

I swallowed my pooling spit and nodded at the ghostly Mage.

For a variety of complicated reasons, I did not forget to hold onto Lackey’s hand in the hand that was not holding onto the vengeful soul. At my nod, Seo Dawon raised his hands and closed his eyes, as if he were concentrating hard.

Soon after, a skill seemed to have been invoked. A golden line, formed like Saturn’s rings, rose near my body. Lackey had blocked its way, cautiously, but calmed down when I pulled its hand closer to me.

The recently created loops slowly wrapped around my body and gradually stopped moving. When all movement stopped, Seo Dawon opened his eyes.

His eyes were tinged with gold–a signal to grip the ‘Essence of a Vengeful Ghost’ tightly.

With a small tinkling sound, the essence broke like a light bulb. After observing the powder left behind, I let go of Lackey’s hand and took out a dagger from my inventory.

“Haaah….” Though the injury was an inevitable factor in completing the ritual, it was always nerve-wracking to harm myself. When I placed the dagger above my palm, Lackey shook its head as if to convince me not to continue. When I didn’t stop, the skeleton thrust its face into my arms and buried its face, unwilling to see me injured.

With the weight of light bones pressed against my thin waist, I cut my palm. Although the dagger had no special skills, it was still classified as an

‘item.’ Unlike normal fruit knives used in ordinary households, the blade quickly tore into my flesh.

Though I couldn’t fully get used to this pain, after cutting myself several times in the previous Dungeon, this ‘second’ summon was bearable.

And, Seo Dawon watched this whole scene without even blinking his eyes.

He didn’t rush me, but I felt a great focus on my summoning technique. His gaze gave me the strength to grasp at my hands, eager to finish this quickly.

As soon as the faint scent of blood wafted into the air, I turned my hands–palms facing down.

Drops of blood dripped onto the floor; the gold rings that Seo Dawon created trembled at each splash. Finally, the broken pieces of the essence gradually permeated into the floor.

You have fulfilled the conditions for summoning a Vengeful Ghost.

The awaited system message didn’t appear until I felt pounding pain in my palm, as if there was another heart palpitating in the cut.

Replaying the memory of the deceased: ‘Jung Garam.’

Before I could even feel relieved at the success, the memory of the deceased began to replay, just like before.

Just before I was sucked into Jung Garam’s memory, my eyes met Seo Dawon’s… He said something to me, but I couldn’t hear his voice because the system had already been activated.

However, I could infer what he had said through the shape of his mouth.

‘Have a safe trip’

And, when [I] opened my eyes once again…

Seo Dawon stood in front of me again, with much colder eyes than before.

Footnotes

1. is shortened term for ‘reality awareness time’. Basically, it means to bring oneself back from delusions or to ground themselves in reality. I felt that ‘recollecting one’s hold on reality’ was a good English equivalent.

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Chapter 55

Chapter 55

“No matter how hard I think…I think I missed something. I’ll be right back.” [I] raised my hand and spoke when [I] saw Dawon’s crumpled forehead as he resolutely looked forward with his arms crossed over his chest.

The fact that the boss will continue to revive even as we kill him using various methods means that this approach isn’t working.

Anyway, [I] don’t know which bastard made this Dungeon, but, seeing how the undead ambled comfortably around, they must have a horrible personality. Usually after a new Dungeon has been released for several years, the contents within won’t seem so terrifying…but especially when you’re trying to master a new raid, one’s first impressions can ruin further experiences. Users become desperate, stuck to one room or approach.

If there was a problem, rather than continuously pouring energy into meaningless efforts…[I’d] rather go on a quest to trigger a new scenario while [I] still had the stamina left.

Dawon-hyung probably already had this idea before [I] thought of it. He was probably contemplating who to send. However, Dawon-hyung didn’t nod his head in agreement when [I] voiced the logical solution.

Huh? That kinda hurts [my] pride? He doesn’t trust [me]?

Across the room, Bang Eunji threw down the gunblade from her shoulders and crossed to my side, pretending to mumble to herself. “Eunji

thinks she can do way better…Jung Garam, who lacks stamina, dies immediately in one hit…but Eunji can take a few shots…”

Is this bitch so bored she’s picking fights with [me]?

But Bang Eunji, unlike her fierce criticism, wandered aimlessly–her eyes glued to the ground–tired but pretending otherwise.

She’s always like that, so [I] wondered if something was wrong in her head…but there were probably more things wrong with her than just her brain. [I] ignored what she said since [I] didn’t want to get tangled up in another fight.

Though [I] tried to ignore her remarks, Bang Eunji continued, “Do you admit that it’s the truth, Jung Garam?” She smiled bleakly at the ground.

Dawon looked briefly at her and shook his head, “Bang Eunji needs to stay with me.”

At his rejection, Bang Eunji’s cheeks turned red and she quietly withdrew. [I] don’t know how she interpreted hyung’s words…’You can’t be controlled without me present?’ Maybe?

What’s funny is that when she speaks to other people, Bang Eunji always looks at the ground or the sky. With Dawon, she can bear to look at his face?

However, Dawon-hyung still refused to grant [my] leave after he ruled out Bang Eunji.

Why is he making things so uncomfortable like this? [I] already offered…

As [I] followed his gaze, [I] could see Kyung-sik’s half-broken golem. Is hyung worried that with [my] departure and with the golem’s steady path towards destruction, there would be a greater burden on the party’s other strikers if [I], one of the main damage dealers, leave?

With a big grin, [I] bragged, “I’ll be back before the Golem shatters.”

“Can you break through on your own?”

Ah…[I] love everything about this hyung except for one thing: he always manages to say things [I] despise hearing. How many times do [I] have to prove myself so that the others won’t doubt [my] ability…

The teasing glint in Dawon hyung’s eyes informed [me] that he was provoking [my] anger on purpose.

“We’ve already cleared the way once. How could I not be able to break through.” [I’m] not some kind of jerk Hunter who only knows how to notch a crossbow.

Besides, [I] acted alone before entering this guild. [I] have far more aptitude for solo-play than party-play. Sure, the level of difficulty is much higher alone, but [my] excitement trumped [my] fear.

Dawon slowly scanned [my] confident expression. “Come back quickly?”

“Yes, yes~” [I] refitted the ‘Armguard of Jubilant Permission’ on [my] forearms.

Suddenly, [I] heard Bae Jaemin’s voice from behind. “I’ll come with you.”

‘Stop trying to preach at me.’

His words overlapped with what Bae Jaemin had said a few mornings ago at the guild research center.

After that day he avoided all eye contact with me, so [I] didn’t bother with him…Only troublesome things can arise from volunteering to follow [me] back into the route: for example, a one-sided apology show.

[I] really hated others evaluating Bae Jaemin's personality as 'nice,'; since that bastard spoke as if he was the main character in a youth drama, rather than a proper conversation it felt like he was reciting lines off of some script. [I] was also annoyed at how he used [me] and our conflicts in crafting a perfect image for himself.

So, early that morning, [I] advised him to fix his peculiar disparities, but he lept into an absurd temper tantrum……

Inwardly, [I] felt refreshed.

[I] happily noticed that beyond that mask he was something human– festering inferiority complexes like any other person. Additionally, it always felt good to metaphorically kick a prick for no good reason.

The next day, when he awkwardly avoided my line of sight, [I] also pretended to be socially debilitated by that same awkwardness. [I] cared little for our fight, honestly, but [I] worried that if I acted casually, Bae Jaemin would once again try and engage me in that fake, rehearsed manner.

But looking at him offering to follow [me]…Is he gradually trying to act all nice again?! Would he babble on about how he was unusually 'harsh' that day–how he was uncharacteristically upset…?

Fucker.

[I] immediately turned to hyung and begged him with my eyes, 'Please reject him!'

"Then, I'll leave it to the two of you."

"But….." [I] whined.

However, Dawon hyung chicly ignored my pleading eyes.

Damn it…Hyung, are you caring about guild harmony and inter compatibility just because you're the guild master?

But, instead of lecturing us on the nature of friendship, Dawon hyung grabbed [me] by the shoulders and talked in that disgusting cheesy voice of his coupled with that devastatingly handsome face. “Don’t get hurt, okay?”

Ah, hyung! [I’m] not gay!

But, [I] couldn’t stop my cheeks from blushing. “I won’t get hurt! If I get back without injury, give me a billion more in the cut!” Flustered, [I] quickly escaped.

Ah. Goosebumps. Seriously.

When [I] first met hyung, [I] thought he’d be the type to not care whether or not [I] died…that sort of dry relationship was comfortable for me.

Since [I] joined the guild, however, he’s treated [me] like a real brother…somehow, it hurts [my] pride that [I] don’t dislike that kind of treatment. Recently, [I’ve] realized how [my] feelings are being swayed by this sort of family play.

Since when did Dawon hyung know [me] well enough to bait me like that? Perhaps [I’m] being sensitive, but [I] hate that subconscious desire to be intimate with another.

Especially that vague desire for family, friendship, love…..

Ugh, it’s pretty hair-raising to be conscious of that weakness. It crossed [my] mind that this way of thinking is what makes Bae Jaemin–who was desperate to be regarded highly in this field–and [I] clash too often.

Originally, [I] was going to speed through whether or not Bae Jaemin followed, but some lingering attachment changed [my] mind. [I] waited until he caught up.

Though the two of us walked alone for at least 10 minutes, Bae Jaemin did not readily offer conversation. [I] thought he was going to start offering useless information about himself and his backstory. [I] was going to

suggest, “If you don’t bother with me, I won’t provoke you either. Let’s just create a cordial relationship with each other.”

Instead, [I] warned, “…Only step on the blue blocks.” Sadly, we were stuck in a situation where [I] had to make the first overtures of conversation. When [we] entered the trap room, the mechanics of the traps were randomized and reset.

But this bastard Bae Jaemin acted as if he didn’t hear me yet still followed my advice.

What the fuck is that?

I mean, I had hoped just now that he’d ignore me for the rest of his life, but I didn’t expect him to be so petty about it.

“Why don’t you at least answer me?”

“…..”

Wow, there’s two of us here, but one is sulking–how aggravating. I glanced at Bae Jaemin out of the corners of my eyes, and he stared back without breaking eye contact.

His eyes weren’t hooded with kowtowing shadows as always, but, rather, his eyes had a glass-bead-like quality to it that seemed to scrutinize our every interaction, pressing at [my] buttons.

How cheeky. How very Bae Jaemin-like.

“Oh, is this another instance where I’m supposedly ‘preaching at you?’ Is that why you’re not responding?” [I] regurgitated that famous line from our conflict earlier this morning. At the same time, Bae Jaemin’s footsteps quieted.

TL: Jung Garam has such a potty mouth~

Also, Thanks to Areli for the kofi, hope you enjoyed this bonus chap.

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Chapter 56

Chapter 56

Something tense–something unsaid–hung between us; [I] looked back at my fellow guild member. Though Bae Jaemin hid his true expression well, he could not hide the tendons sticking out on his hands as he clenched his fists.

[I] was intrigued–it was the first time I saw him unable to hide his angry tells. Was there a limit to his charade?

Maybe…

[I] glanced down at [Beatrice's Prayer] on my arm and fiddled with it, bringing attention to the accessory. "Then, is it because of this?"

Then, Bae Jaemin's thin lips twisted.

[I] had unintentionally overheard a conversation after a previous raid… Before the reward items were distributed, Bae Jaemin asked Dawon hyung, "Who's going to get the [Beatrice's Prayer]?"

Dawon hyung immediately said [my] name, no room for reconsideration. Bae Jaemin nodded and ended the conversation, acting as if he was simply asking out of pure curiosity…But [I] clearly remembered the Priest's distorted expression after he turned his back on our guild master after their short talk.

Though [I] knew that Bae Jaemin was greedy for this item, [I] accepted it without hesitation because the bracelet was something [I] needed.

Funny thing is, the day [Beatrice's Prayer] was handed to [me], all the other guild members jeered and cursed, but Bae Jaemin, face shuttered like a folding screen, smiled as if to congratulate [me].

"You know, if you really wanted this item, then you should have argued for it–instead of acting so gloomy behind me. That's tiring." [I] drawled. I remembered snorting at his fake expression. Those who didn't know me probably thought I was being mean–but they're the ones who couldn't perceive what a snake Bae Jaemin truly was.

However, instead of a full-blown argument as I had expected, Bae Jaemin kept his mocking smile intact at my words. He readied his Priest weapon, [Divine Staff], in his hands.

Though [I] thought, 'Is that crazy bastard really going to hit me with that?' [I] wasn't particularly wary.

Dawon hyung banned the guild members from actual infighting, even as a joke. Breaking that cardinal rule would mean 'expulsion', and in our guild, 'expulsion' often meant death…He's aware of that consequence, and yet he's still aiming to attack [me]?

As soon as he aimed that staff at [me], he unleashed his skills and moved with a purpose.

He inflicted curses or status abnormalities that were the most tricky for Hunters like [me] to counter: effects that would block [my] view or disrupt [my] mobility.

It wasn't until [I] narrowly avoided death a few times that [I] realized Bae Jaemin wasn't using his skills out of rage.

These weren't attacks that originated from impulsive anger.

The extremely calculated skill links…this persistence…

"Have you finally gone insane?" [I] shouted. He's not just attacking me–he's attacking me with the intent to kill?

It wasn’t so surprising that Bae Jaemin would hate [me] so much that he couldn’t think of anything else but [my] destruction…but something was so unsettling about his unguarded killing intent–especially considering that two-faced personality of his.

[I] lowered my center of gravity and kept [my] distance from him.

Bae Jaemin calmly called out to [me] while observing my cautious hesitation, “Why? Afraid now that I’m no longer wearing a mask?” He raised his bowed head…That bastard was laughing–though the amusement did not reach his eyes. Violent temper permeated through his gaze.

What made him so confident?

[I] fixed [my] hold on [my] dagger.

The bastard added, watching [my] wary eyes, “I don’t think you’re in a situation to be worried about me or my intentions.”

Simultaneously, a burning pain climbed up [my] spine.

The sense of disharmony–the tenseness–in the air, that [I] had been distracted by since earlier had been revealed.

However, before the attacker’s weapon could fully penetrate [my] body, [I] managed to turn around and avoid maximum damage to the internal organs. [I] pressed my hand to my solar plexus and, initiating [Stealth], decided to gain some distance.

When [I] disappeared, Bae Jaemin’s collaborator presented himself. “It’s not much fun here? I should have gone sightseeing at Seo Dawon’s side.” The one who approached from the shadows was a large man–a Warrior?–with a big scar across his face.

However, the man carried a short spear instead of a sword; it was quite peculiar for a Warrior to equip spears instead of their usual bladed wheelhouse. [I] thought I knew all of the talented Users, but his was a new face to [me].

And, there was one thing he said that unsettled me. What do you mean by Seo Dawon's side? No way…Are you saying that I'm not the only one being attacked but all the other guild members are also being ambushed?

"Let's wrap things up quickly here and join them."

"Shall we? Well, I don't think there's a particular need to stall…."

The two of them, to [my] disgust, talked nonchalantly, as if they could care less where [I]'ve [stealthed] myself. They acted as if [I] were already a corpse.

"Jisoo noonim went in before me." [1]

When familiar names were mentioned in their conversation, [I] became more shocked than angry.

….Jisoo nunim? Don't tell me…Lim Jisoo?

[I] swallowed the bile rising from [my] throat and opened [my] system to send an emergency message–[I] needed to inform the others quickly!

However, as soon as the status window loaded with the messaging app, the unknown Warrior suddenly flung the spear in his hand.

Though [I] was sure the spear was flung in a completely random direction, the spear suddenly turned sharply and flew towards [me]. Though the [stealth] effect had not been released, the point was aimed directly at [my] neck. [I] had no choice but to endure the pain and roll on the floor.

When the spear hit the wall, the Warrior gestured with his hand. Like a boomerang, his weapon returned to his hand.

As soon as his fingers grasped at the spear's shaft, he threw it again. No matter how off his aim was, the spear always turned sharply in the air and quickly rained down upon [my] location.

Fucker. What kind of item can penetrate through [my] [stealth]?

Eventually, [I] decided it was pointless to keep hidden and lifted the skill.

“Wow, it’s been said that it’s rare to see Red Lotus Jung Garam’s bare face…I’m so lucky,” the Warrior drawled.

Instead of responding to that smirking face, [I] threw my dagger at him.

However, he lightly grabbed the dagger when the blade was inches from his nose. As a show of strength, he crumpled the A-class item–smelt using dragon scales–like paper and threw it at his feet.

[I] spat blood mixed with spit and shouted towards Bae Jaemin standing so relaxed behind that ignorant Warrior bastard, “Bae Jaemin, you son of a bitch! Are you joining hands with Lim Jisoo?”

Instead of answering, Bae Jaemin lifted his [Divine Staff]. Sacred light filled the trap room.

As soon as the blinding light exploded from his weapon, [I] turned my head. As expected, the two seemed to have been waiting for a gap in [my] vision–tingling pain erupted from my cheek as a spear passed through and grazed the skin there. [I] could hear a crashing sound as the spear embedded itself in the wall behind me. If [I] hadn’t turned right at that moment, [my] head would have also been pierced through and staked to the wall.

This isn’t good.

For the first time, [I] felt that [I] could die. Furthermore, [I] might die while being mocked by Bae Jaemin, whom I had always despised.

Of course, Dawon hyung may come to my rescue with the other guild members, but Bae Jaemin had planned this betrayal for a long time and had even garnered Lim Jisoo’s help. They may not be able to deal with their ambush quickly.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

In the distance, I could dimly hear the sound of the Golem's self-destruction countdown.

Kyung-sik's golem probably blew up. The noise was ominous because [I] couldn't tell whether the cause was a monster from the Dungeon or Lim Jisoo's machinations. Lee Kyung-sik would be lucky to not become luggage; as an Alchemist, he had no means of attack after the golem disappeared.

So, I desperately needed to return to them.

"It seems you have enough free time to think about other things?"Said the arrogant spear-bearer. He constantly interrupted [my] efforts to get at Bae Jaemin; [I] had already received a huge blow and was on the verge of collapse.

What should [I] do?

The more time wasted here, the more disadvantageous it would be for both [me] and the other guild members.

TN: Early updates because I'm traveling this week so I'm spending today on a plane!

Footnotes

1. Nunim is basically a respectful way to say noona. It's a mishmash of the word Nuna/noona and the suffix -nim. I choose not to translate these out to English because I feel that indexical phrases like these really showcase the particulars of relationships and personality.

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Chapter 57

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[My] bones ached and rattled from the first ambush. [I] did’t know what kind of ripped-up state [my] back was in, but I could feel [my] body slowing down–unable to catch up to [my] racing mind. [I] had lost so much blood that [my] clothes were starting to stick to [me].

Furthermore, while Bae Jaemin may be passive at this moment…If he were to properly attack in tandem with the spear-wielder, [I] would be pushed back without fail.

It was obvious that the more time dragged on, Bae Jaemin would have the upper hand…So, [I] looked at my surroundings to see if [I] could take advantage of the scenery.

“You’re amazing. You’re the first, Jung Garam-nim, to withstand for so long after being struck by my spear.” The Warrior recovered his weapon and held it instead of immediately flinging it as he did before.

Then, he bragged, “This weapon’s name is [Gáe Bulg]. It’s a spear used by Cú Chulainn, a hero of Irish mythology.” He looked at me meaningfully, as if he expected [me] to be surprised at its illustrious name. [1]

Of course, as a ranker, [I] was familiar with the special weapons that inherited the spirits of earthly myths. Users pridefully live by clenching at supposed ‘rare’ items, but a ‘mythical’ spear used by heroes of legends…No wonder he’s so proud of himself.

At his superiority complex, [I] spat the blood in [my] mouth at the ground. “So…What you’re saying is that you’re still floundering with that kind of spear.” [I] didn’t necessarily mean to provoke him, but those were [my] honest thoughts as soon as [I] heard the item’s prolific name.

If [I] had the [Gáe Bulg], these two would already have burst heads. Honestly, even Odin’s [Gungnir], in the hands of incompetents, would be no better than feces.

[I] pointed out that even with a legendary item [I] was successfully stalling for time. The spear-wielder pretended to laugh, forcing calm into his voice, but [my] words pierced his core.

He bent his knees, entering a ready stance. “I apologize, then. Then try avoiding this!” He muttered “[Listrad]” under his breath.

Was that a skill? Waiting for a spear to fly over, [I] crouched down and observed him.

However, contrary to my expectations, nothing particularly great happened. Instead…the spearman’s forearm doubled. Like pulling a bowstring, he pulled back and wound his right hand tightly behind his back.

As the arm swung, I heard what sounded like the roar of a bullet ripping past. The spear shot at a terrifying pace, but, because of its straight path, it was easy to dodge.

…Or at least I thought it was easy…

“Knnngh!” When [I] returned to my senses, [my] body had already been skewered. [I] clearly identified the optimal dodge path and moved so that the spear would barely miss…

Unable to overcome the shock, [I] collapsed onto [my] knees. The footsteps of the spearman trudged closer.

“This spear is nicknamed ‘the spear of mortal death.’Once it penetrates the body, the spear point splits, damaging all the organs and tearing them to

pieces.” The man gloated.

“…….”

At the same time, [I] felt a terrible pain, as if [my] stomach lining was being torn layer by layer. [I] opened my mouth, but no sound came out: [I] had no energy left to scream. Regardless of [my] will, [my] body convulsed on the ground.

A rough touch grabbed at [my] head. “I’ve been missing on purpose. It’s much easier to hunt if my prey arrogantly assumes that they can avoid my attacks.”

[I] recalled the strange movements of the spear during [our] bout. The seemingly straightforward trajectory was slowly recreated within [my] memories.

[I] gazed over at Bae Jaemin, who seemingly hadn’t moved and opted to monitor the current situation. Then, [I] realized how despite dodging the spear embedded itself in my stomach.

Damn it…

From the very beginning–as the man fired his spear–Bae Jaemin hid the true trajectory by creating a ‘hallucination’ or an illusory double. [I] was deceived by that illusion, dodging only the fakes.

[I] angrily tried to turn [my] head and glare at Bae Jaemin, but [my] body–let alone [my] neck–refused to move. Too much blood had probably spilled from the wound–red liquid gushing out after the spearman took back his weapon.

[My] intuition was not wrong.

Bae Jaemin had simply exploited that sensitivity.

“I’ll use Beatrice well.” Bae Jaemin approached and nauseatingly smiled as if he hadn’t noticed my chagrin and gritted teeth. [My] cooling arms couldn’t resist as he pulled [my] wrist towards him.

Humiliating.

[I] wanted to spit in his face, but my mouth was blocked by the fragments of [my] organs bubbling up through the esophagus. The Warrior bastard also roughly released my head, knowing that [I] had suffered an irreversibly lethal blow.

With the loss of the Warrior's support, [my] body fully collapsed. Only [my] arm remained in the air as Bae Jaemin tugged his prize off [my] wrist. Beatrice would become de-possessed after its owner died…and [I] had become a corpse just waiting for death.

"I think they've succeeded over there as well…Let's wrap things up and leave," the Warrior said.

"Go ahead."

"……Of course." After the two finished their conversation above [my] slumped head, the spearman left first.

After the unknown man's footsteps disappeared into the distance, Bae Jaemin began talking to himself in a low voice. "Ah, but it's a little heartbreaking that Olim noona has to die. If only she was someone that could be persuaded or placated." His mutters felt a touch bitter.

Sure, everything was a charade, but is he implying that his affection for Olim noona was genuine?

Volcanic anger rose up as [I] listened to his abominable whining; [I] had the sudden desire to forget all of the pain and kill him somehow. Strategies flashed through [my] mind, like a murderous kaleidoscope–it's true what they say, your mind becomes crystal clear just before death.

If [I] die and donate my bracelet to this son of a bitch, how would [I] be different from any of the monsters we've been defeating so far?

However, [I] couldn't do much to screw him over in this state. Considering my wounds, [I] probably only had 5 minutes remaining…[I]

needed to find a way to take Bae Jaemin down with me in that period of time…

Luckily as [I] stared at the blue floor–face stuck against the cold tiles–[I] quickly crafted a plan. In order to execute this plan, [I] struggled to summon [my] inventory. The opaque system window, which usually appeared easily at a single call, refused to manifest with strange error noises.

‘Jung Garam’s’ status is currently ‘in extreme danger.’ Inventory materialization will be difficult.

First aid will not be possible with potions less than ‘elixir’ rank.

Would you like to request permission to use the ‘Emergency Escape Kit?’

Unread messages from ‘Seo Dawon’……

The system was probably warning [me] to take care of [my] health first instead of bringing up the inventory……[I] swallowed the ‘shut up’ that threatened to spill out of [my] mouth and focused [my] mind once more.

Fortunately, when [I] closed [my] eyes and concentrated on the inventory, I called forth [my] desired item in the hand that wasn’t clasped in Bae Jaemin’s grasp.

Would you like to use the trap bomb crafted by ‘creator – Choi Kyung-sik–pension priority number 1’? [2]

If used close by, you may be caught up in the explosion. After installing the bomb, please detonate after retreating to a safe distance.

Of course, [I] didn’t expect this bomb to kill Bae Jaemin. He’s a Priest, so he can restore himself if he were to be caught in an explosion.

However, what would happen if this block were to mess with the blue block–the safe zone?

[I] attached the bomb to the floor without delay and immediately pressed the [Detonate Immediately] option. Bae Jaemin’s belated shout alongside the ticking sound entered [my] ears–but soon afterward, all noise disappeared.

End playback of the deceased, ‘Jung Garam’s’ memory.

Buy Me a Coffee

TN: RIP Jung Garam, you hedgehog.

Thank you to Lewe for the Kofi! I wanted to get out this bonus chapter before I got on the plane and died from motion sickness lmao. I’m going on

a trip back to the childhood home, but, since I have stockpiled chapters, uploads will go out as usual~ Thank you for reading!

Footnotes

1. Cu Chulainn was born Setanta, but gained the name after his coming under Culann’s service after killing his hound. Hence the name: Cu chulainn is “Culann’s hound.” The hero was known to be brutal, vicious, and beautiful. Gae Bolg, his spear, was known as the spear of mortal pain/death or the ‘belly spear.’
2. I wasn’t sure how best to translate this, but Choi Kyung-sik essentially left a signature on the bomb in a bit of a chuunibyou/eighth grader syndrome way. It’s a plea for more money, aka retirement funds.

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Chapter 58

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This “memory playback” seemed to be the process of repeating the last moments of the prospective contracted soul.

Since Necromancers grow stronger as their servants increase in number or are strengthened, they must be granted the ability to dig into their memories to properly identify the source of their deep grudge. I could now intuit some of the ways the system directs and develops Users.

However, there was a huge problem with this method. Because I was dragged into these most terrible final memories, I found that I was unduly swayed by the dead’s pain and emotions.

The indescribable sensation of the spear penetrating my stomach…The anger towards Bae Jaemin which filled my mind…All of that blocked my chest, suffocating me.

Of course, rationally, I knew the facts.

I’m not Jung Garam. These were three-year-old memories. However, no matter how many times I repeated those words, I was still stuck in the grip of those vivid sensations.

–Huh? What’s this?

Fortunately, a feisty voice distracted me and helped me resist the effects of the memory. My eyes snapped open.

A new problem had appeared…Logically, I should be back in my quarters with Lackey and Seo Dawon, but when I opened my eyes, all I

could see was a space flooded with dark blue water.

At first, I had thought I fell into the deep sea, and I held my breath automatically. But, soon I realized that my breathing was not affected and calmed down.

Although I was surrounded on all sides by water, my surroundings didn't behave like liquid. My movements, for example, were not impeded.

I had been to a similarly quiet and bizarre place before. Back when I signed my contract with Seo Dawon, the Mage dragged me into this safe space during my time of crisis…Though the situation was different, the vibe felt similar.

Seo Dawon, at the time, had told me that the starry void he dragged me into was a 'place governed by his consciousness.' Then, wouldn't this be a place governed by Jung Garam's consciousness–though the midst of a nebula is a far different setting from the sea.

–I know I felt a trace of Dawon hyung's mana…Why can't I see him?

Jung Garam's sonorous voice resonated within that empty space, supporting my guess.

Perhaps after 'memory playback,' I'm forcibly moved into the deceased's consciousness…Jung Garam seemed to be observing me.

"Um…Hello. So, I'm…uh…Choi Lee-kyung…" I hesitantly greeted.

–…..

It felt like 10 minutes have crept by since I first spoke…Oddly, Jung Garam didn't show any reaction.

I didn't know if the Treasure Hunter was wary of me or if there were other problems, so I shifted awkwardly from side to side and looked around. Beneath my feet, I found a large star-shaped magic circle filled to the brim with triangles. I paused for a moment, observing this geometric oddity.

What on earth could this be?

–Why’d you stop talking?

“Ack!” I gasped, surprised by the sudden sound of Jung Garam’s voice; as I retreated, the star-shaped magic circle glided with my feet.

Though I was still curious about the mystery of the magic circle, I ignored it in favor of shouting at where I thought the origin of Jung Garam’s voice was. “….Uh, well…I’m a…Necromancer. I’m the one who called back the dead Jung Garam-nim.”

–…….

Once again, Jung Garam remained quiet, as if to urge me to continue.

The problem was, after that introduction, I had no idea what more I should say.

Judging from what I could glean from Jung Garam’s personality during his ‘memory playback,’ he’s likely to be opposed to the contract even if I try to be slick about its benefits. If I were to talk about Seo Dawon, the sequence of events was too long-winding; I wouldn’t know where to begin. With all that in mind, it may be dangerous to talk about Bae Jaemin, his most detested enemy.

“A Necromancer can avenge a spirit’s grudge…it’s a job we’ll work on together. In short…Jung Garam-nim lends me his strength and I’ll settle his vengeance…I called on you because I wanted to sign a ‘vengeful ghost’ contract.”

So, I thought it would be best to start with the basics. Fortunately, Jung Garam continued to listen to my story silently without interruption. “And before Jung Garam-nim…I also signed a contract with Seo Dawon-nim. That familiar mana you felt is probably from that connection.”

–Dawon hyung signed a contract with you?

However, when I mentioned my contract with Seo Dawon, Jung Garam responded in a disbelieving tone.

–So then, you're saying that Dawon hyung is also dead?

I felt a little uncomfortable at his question–his words revealed his fervent belief, 'Dawon hyung could never have died.'

Additionally, I was reluctant to break the bad news to him since I knew, from the 'memory playback,' that Jung Garam regarded Seo Dawon like family.

My silence seemed to suffice as an answer, as Jung Garam came to the correct conclusion.

–Then, what about the other guild members?

"…They all died."

The magic circle underneath my feet began to glow blue and heated up simultaneously with my words.

The light was so strong, I could barely tear my eyes away from it. In the end, I ducked my head into my arms to avoid being blinded; I didn't raise my head until I felt everything blow over.

"Whoa…!"

Surprisingly, right before my eyes, a huge shark stared back at me.

The shark opened its vicious mouth towards me. I almost screamed, but fortunately, the shark did not rush forward. Instead, something that looked like black tentacles wriggled out.

The tentacles that fell from the shark's mouth became taut, as if someone tugged at each end; soon, they began to tangle amongst each other and formed a shape.

The form they created, intertwining into knots and cords, was a human-shaped skeleton. Last time, Seo Dawon appeared out of the buds of lotus flowers; this time, the soul seemed to crawl out of a shark's mouth.

Soon afterwards, the skull was completed. The languishing skeleton suddenly raised its head.

The skull was branded with a complex seal upon its forehead, just as with Seo Dawon, but the pattern was so different that even without the other strange manifestations, the seal alone could distinguish it from the Mage's.

However, the red eyes that seemed to glow from the depths of the skull were quite similar. Jung Garam, in the shape of a skeleton, reached towards me without hesitation…I locked my legs in place in order to stop the instinctual desire to avoid his touch.

A freezing cold hand grabbed my chin.

–I guess I should hear more from you?

So I told him all that had happened.

From the events in the <Tower of Command> to how I signed a contract with his Seo Dawon, etc… He didn't ask, but I also informed him that Bae Jaemin was currently the guild master of the most popular guild.

As soon as I brought up Bae Jaemin, I realized that the strange coldness I felt was the bloodthirst that Jung Garam emitted. During the news of Bae Jaemin's current success, the coldness that emanated from his fingers to my jaw was so powerful I could barely stand it.

In the end, I stumbled, unable to stand the force of his anger; Jung Garam paused and restrained his bloodthirst. Bewildered by the shivers that wracked my body, Jung Garam took his hand off my chin and muttered.

–But why did hyung sign with a guy like you? You're a complete weakling.

"……."

Of course, I could understand why Jung Garam had his doubts. I realized after I began dungeoneering seriously that it was nonsense for a Mage of Seo Dawon's caliber to partner with someone like me.

However, I stayed silent, unwilling to tell Jung Garam that Seo Dawon originally had no intention of contracting with me…but changed his mind after watching me whine and beg.

TN: Poor Garam… he couldn't imagine how his hyung would have lost.

Thanks for reading >.< I'm still catching up on the bonus chap~ I'll get one out tomorrow I think~

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Chapter 59

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I have no idea how Jung Garam interpreted my silence, but he simply clicked his tongue.

–You can’t tell me before I sign the contract?

“Ah, that’s….” I was going to deny any such special condition, but Jung Garam’s bluish hands grabbed my wrist before I could finish speaking.

A system message popped up before my very eyes as soon as he grabbed me.

Would you like to update your vengeful ghost contract?’

….Updating the contract?

I momentarily paused, unable to understand. The system urged me forward with a supplementary explanation, [‘Jung Garam’ wishes to sign a contract with you.]

How should I say this…There were a few differences from compared to the first contract experience.

When I first contracted with Seo Dawon, plenty of messages popped up, explaining each step of the way; perhaps because this was my second time, the system offered no such patient tutorials. Though the process had

become more concise, I was still tripped up by the unfamiliarity of the situation.

Of course, I couldn't complain–the sooner I sign the contract the sooner I could welcome the Treasure Hunter into my party.

So, I rushed to press the [Yes] button.

Vengeful ghost summon has been activated.

As soon as I confirmed my intent to continue, the [Vengeful Ghost Summon] button changed yellow to signal that the skill had been activated. A familiar red holographic parchment appeared between Jung Garam's skeletal shape and me.

The contents of the parchment were no different from before as well, except that Jung Garam's name replaced the Mage's. It was as if…the system copy-pasted the previous contract and passed the duplicate off as something novel?

–Ooh…The conditions are quite good?

After reading the terms, Jung Garam nodded in satisfaction. Of course… this contract was disadvantageous for party "A," me; Party "B," Jung Garam, should have no qualms.

The terms between Seo Dawon and me were already unfair, so I was once again anxious to see the lopsided clauses. However, I didn't dare modify these provisions…and, again, I signed my name on the line for party "A."

As soon as I wrote the last "g" for 'Choi Lee-kyung,' the parchment divided in half–once again, each half slipped to our palms.

The parchment piece melted into a floppy red cord. However, unlike before, the red cord did not engrave itself into my ring finger; instead, the contract sank below the skin of my left wrist, like a tattoo of a thin bracelet.

Coincidentally, the mark of the contract was located where Jung Garam would have worn his [Beatrice's Prayer]. I rubbed at the red pattern with my thumb, a bit uncomfortable at the parallels.

The 'Vengeful Ghost Contract' has been renewed.

The contract will immediately go into effect.

A new servant, 'Jung Garam,' has been added.

The success of the 'Vengeful Ghost Contract' has greatly increased your level! Please check your stats!

Name: Choi Lee-kyung – Lv 69
Class: Junior Necromancer

HP: 101,500
MP: 41,000

Title: Greenhorn Adventurer – tasting the bitterness of life!
(While using the title 'Greenhorn Adventurer', movement speed will increase by 5%)

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):
Magic: 408
Magic control: 3.4% [1]
Movement Speed: 22.7% (+5%)

Skill:

– Summon evil spirits

[Summon vengeful ghosts: Proficiency 75%, Rank: Intermediate – High]
[Summon sacrificial offering: Proficiency 0.7%, Rank: Lowest Grade]

– Command Servants
Current number of commandable beings: (1/3)

(‘Lackey’ currently has two main skills available.)

–Possession
If special conditions are met, the servant can use the summoner’s body.

– Death Mark (New!)
After special conditions are met, you can attach a death mark to the enemy. A living enemy marked by death will suffer a significant loss in defense; furthermore, you can gain additional experience.

– A new servant, ‘Seo Dawon,’ has been added.

(‘Seo Dawon’ Currently has 115 main skills, 33 auxiliary skills, 25 summons, and 3 powerful combat magic finishers. However, due to the difference between the level of servant and summoner, all skill attack power has been significantly reduced and certain skills are currently unavailable.)

– A new servant, ‘Jung Garam,’ has been added. (New!)

(‘Jung Garam’ currently has 80 main skills, 21 trap removal and pathfinding skills, 7 assassination skills, and 4 anti-person powerful combat skills. However, due to the difference between the level of servant and summoner, all skill attack power has been significantly reduced and certain skills are currently unavailable)

The system informed me of my level increases and the addition of a new skill, alongside basic information on Jung Garam.

It states that I can utilize something called a [Death Mark]…Is this an actual mark I can place and remove on an enemy? I was confused by the vague explanation and decided to ask Seo Dawon for clarification.

…I wasn't being very honest to myself, however. As soon as I closed my own status window, I opened up Jung Garam's–too curious about my new contract's abilities. "Jung Garam's Status Window!" I shouted.

Jung Garam – 'Choi Lee-kyung's' servant.
Class: Legendary Special Hunter (Unique Assassin class)

HP – 27,000,000/27,000,000
MP – 82,000,000/82,000,000

Loyalty: Extremely low

Attributes: Lunacy, Evil, Darkness, Wisdom, Chaos, Endurance, Belligerence, Charisma.

Title:

Dragon Slayer – violent crazed dragon. A limited title given only to the first warriors to slay the Second Company's ruler, Aestheya.
<The 'Dragon Slayer' title increases all physical and magical attacks by 150%>

Special Hunter – A title only given to the most extraordinary hunters amongst the numerous sea of normal Treasure Hunters who have mapped more than 100 unexplored Dungeons or paths–unrivaled in their ability andsingle-handedly.
<The 'Special Hunter' title increases agility by 10%.>

Matara's assassin – A title granted to the assassin who single-handedly protected the tyrant Matara and assassinated 10,000 archers, 7,000 spearmen, 200 master-class knights, and 5 archmages.
<The 'Matara's assassin' title grants you priority on all assassination related contracts. Additionally, you can use the [Black Market]'s VIP ticket at any time.>

Current mood: 'Jung Garam's' loyalty is too low, so his inner thoughts are hidden.

Durability: Infinite (If Jung Garam is attacked for more than his total health, he will be reversed summoned back into Choi Lee-kyung's personal space, and the user will sustain the overflow damage. Re-summon Cooldown time: 24 hours)

Stats:

Strength +1,180,000
Magic +350,000
Stamina +510,000
Agility +977,000
Luck +832,000
Intelligence +590,000
Physical Critical Damage: 5,335%
Max Physical Damage: 2,774%
Min Physical Damage: 1,003%
Physical Crit Chance: 90%
Curse Resistance: 9.41%
Vs. Monster Armor Pierce: 67%
Vs Monster Magic Resistance Pierce: 32%
Physical Skill Cooldown Time Reduction: 81.87%
Probability of Causing Status Effect 'Poison' with Skills: 20.22%

Main skills: What follows are the top five most proficient skills that are currently available.

–Explosion: You can use bombs to destroy the surrounding terrain or enemies.

–Dark Counter: A powerful counter that ignores the defenses of a specified target.

–Dark Gambit: Coat your shade-touched energy with poison and use it to stop enemy movement.

–Darkest Descent: Over a period of time, movement speed increases significantly and skills will output their maximum damage.

–Mapping: Update dungeon information in real-time, and share the information with party members quickly.

Enhancement: ‘Jung Garam’ cannot be enhanced.

That’s crazy.

Everything, from the stats to the skills, was crazy…But, in particular, I couldn’t tear my eyes away from Jung Garam’s titles.

He earned the ‘Matara’s Assassin’ title?

That title was incredibly famous. A long while ago, a video titled <Don’t ever follow my example. The top 10 titles that risk your life> was uploaded to Youtube.

It was unbelievable to confirm that someone had already acquired this title because the acquisition condition itself was ridiculous. The mission entailed breaking into a heavily armed castle and assassinating the fiercely guarded king.

What’s even more unbelievable was that Jung Garam could barely have been twenty years old when he died in the <Tower of Command>.

When you looked at the list of titles, you could roughly guess the timeline. Since Dragon Slayer is the most recent, the title rests at the top… Then, Jung Garam won all those other titles as a minor…

“Seen everything?” A blunt voice cut across my thoughts, and I raised my head to see Jung Garam’s appearance for the first time. His features were even more shocking than what was contained in his status window.

It’s just…Jung Garam…

“What’s with that stupid expression?” The Treasure Hunter asked.

Why does he look so cute?

While looking at me, Jung Garam didn’t hide his disdainful expression, but I paid little attention to that. I concentrated instead on how his chic look contrasted with his squishy cheeks that had yet to lose their baby fat

Then, in vain, I tried to return to my senses and carefully scrutinized his face again…He had the unique markers of an undead: those red pupils and deathly aura…This spirit clearly claimed to be the recently contracted Jung Garam, but…

No matter how I see it….

He’s just too cute?

I’m not kidding. Among all the people I’ve seen…He’s seriously the cutest. Though with his eyebrows raised impatiently, Jung Garam looked like he had quite the temper. Even then, his pouty cheeks and crumpled forehead made him look like a coy and crabby child.

I think he’s slightly shorter than me as well?

Since I’ve never seen a man shorter than me since I arrived at the Hub, Jung Garam’s appearance pushed me beyond shock and pushed me into indignant feelings of disharmony.

He’s the ‘best’ assassin with that kind of face?

TN: Fanart depiction of Jung Garam (Fox) with Lee-kyung (Hamster)
(Source: Guak on Posttype)

Footnotes

1. I think the author made a typo with the raws, but since I’m not 100% sure, I’ll keep these values. They’re less than the previous stats she gave though :(

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Chapter 60

Chapter 60

“Ah, it’s nothing. Please, excuse me.” I immediately shook my head and averted my gaze. I clamped my mouth shut to stop myself from babbling nonsense.

However, Jung Garam seemed to have drawn his own conclusions from my odd reactions. He frowned and approached closer, “Hey. Why do you look so stiff after looking through my status window?”

“Huh?”

“Why do you have such a grim expression after going through the effort to summon me. You got a problem?” He raised his index finger and pressed the point down on my chest.

My arms involuntarily unfolded from the unexpected touch, “Oh no! You’re very impressive…” I hurried to make excuses, but Jung Garam’s eyes thinned.

“You’re not comparing me and hyung just because you signed with Dawon hyung first, right? Hyung’s a spellcaster type; I’m an assassin.”

“What? Ah, that’s not it. That’s truly not what I was thinking…!” I became nervous as Jung Garam pressed at my chest with every word I said. “It’s not that…I was just surprised that someone managed to pick up the ‘Matara’s assassin’ title…I was just speechless.” I said, spitting out whatever came to mind.

At those words, Jung Garam’s finger suddenly stopped.

I felt that his sullen expression brightened a little, though I wasn’t sure the minute change was just simply my imagination.

“Hmm-hmm. That’s true, I had a super hard time picking that one up…” Garam said.

“Ah…….”

“You know a thing or two about titles, don’t you?”

Special conditions have been met. The ‘friendship’ stat has now been unlocked for servants.

Servant, ‘Jung Garam’s’ friendship has raised by +1.

Jung Garam’s lips turned up at the corners as an unfamiliar system message simultaneously popped up, informing me of a new mechanic.

….A new stat?

I had no idea what this new ‘Friendship’ stat meant, and I also had no idea why Jung Garam’s friendliness suddenly rose. But, just in case, I continued to speak carefully to the Treasure Hunter who still stood right in front of me. “Have you ever recorded your run through of the Matara’s Assassin raid? I think I’ve seen that video.”

“Really? Why? You’re a Necromancer.”

“Well…I just like to watch anything cool, regardless of class.”

“Knnk!” At my words, Jung Garam inexplicably bit his lips and turned his head away. Seeing how his cheeks flushed pink, I think he liked my flattery.

Furthermore…..

Servant, ‘Jung Garam’s’ friendship has raised by +5.

Isn’t the system message clearly informing me about the change in his emotions? It seems that friendship increases with the servant’s good mood. What’s good about increasing friendship, anyway? However, it was useless to try and make sense of the current situation right now. In order to find answers, we should leave this space.

Fortunately, my desire to leave was impeccably timed: the space surrounding us began to distort and slowly melt away. This, too, was a phenomenon I’d experienced with Seo Dawon during his contract signing.

However, as the space around us shattered, unfamiliar faces began to reflect on the surfaces of the fractured reality. Most shards showed unfamiliar people, but, in between the masses, a few showcased Bae Jaemin and Seo Dawon. With a complicated heart, I watched as their snapshots disappeared.

This is a space controlled by Jung Garam’s consciousness…Then, are those people reflected in the shards of breaking reality elements that made the Treasure Hunter who he is today?

Nothing like this happened in Seo Dawon’s space…Of course, everyone has different personalities and tendencies, so everyone’s consciousness may

not be the same.

“Hey, take my hand.”

A small hand popped out in front of me, cutting my contemplation short. I complied and grabbed Jung Garam’s hand.

As our surroundings collapsed, the ground before my feet shook, and I reeled around like a reed swayed by strong winds…I was a bit touched because I didn’t think Jung Garam wouldn’t think to take care of me like this.

“T-thank you.” I awkwardly thanked him, holding onto his soft hands like a lifeline.

Fortunately, before the situation could become more awkward, a blinding light burst through a rip in reality. When I turned my head to avoid the glare, the air felt different on my skin.

We safely returned back to my quarters.

* * *

“Dawon-ie hyung”

When the pure white light faded and I opened my eyes, I was confronted with an unexpected scenario.

Seo Dawon sat on the sofa with a sour expression and crossed legs while Jung Garam faced him with an even colder expression.

Huh? Weren’t the two of them close?

[Clack clack clack clackclackclack]

I was attacked when my body momentarily paused in the face of such a chilly reunion; a black shadow jumped at me from behind the sofa. The black shadow, Lackey, chattered energetically.

I opened my arms, happy to see Lackey after such an ordeal. How Lackey did not stop at barreling into my arms but instead grabbed the hem of my hoodie and began to crawl up inside the fabric; Lackey hugged my head completely and clung tight.

"W-what's wrong? I can't breathe…" I dragged Lackey from its perch and hugged it, attempting to calm it down. The combined shivering weight however pushed me down and I fell backward.

I was slightly embarrassed at my own clumsiness, but, even after I plopped down gracelessly on the floor, my servants, excluding Lackey, paid no attention to us. Neither made a noise, consumed with each other. Somehow, the lack of acknowledgment was even more embarrassing than my fall.

What on earth is wrong with them?

Honestly, I expected that when we returned Jung Garam would leap at Seo Dawon, embracing him with tears in his eyes…At least, that's what I thought.

My expectations were clearly shattered by Jung Garam's blunt words. "Hyung. Did we really get screwed? Where's this? Did we lose all of our properties too?"

"……"

"No way, are you saying we've only got this small, booger-sized place… This isn't the only real estate at our command, right?"

…To be exact, this home isn't *our* place; it's *mine*.

After a short silence, Seo Dawon replied in a somber voice, "I think we've been done in by Kim Olim's jinx…"

“Hah. That noona, seriously…honestly…Do you think Olim noona got cursed by a legendary witch? Look at what happened with each guild she’s gotten tangled with….” Garam said.

“So, I’m considering contacting Bae Jaemin and asking him to consider adding Kim Olim to HaHae’s roster.”

“Haaah…Olim Noona’s jinx is so scary. Who would have known that my successful life would have been derailed like this.”

I listened to their conversation until that point before I narrowly pulled Lackey off my head. Now free of any obstructions, I stared at the two. I had no choice but to involuntarily flinch…They were no longer facing each other but were now staring at me while continuing their conversation.

“Uh…….” W-what? Are they expecting me to say something?

So, I scratched my cheek and opened my mouth to speak…But, before I could say anything, both servants heaved a deep sigh. I felt disgruntled by their reaction, but their ensuing conversation made me feel even worse.

“Did you see Lee-kyung-ie’s status window?” Seo Dawon asked.

“Sure. I even rubbed my eyes several times as well…What the hell did you even see there that made you want to sign a contract with him?”

“You see why I had you revived first after me, right?”

“Ah, I’d rather try to break through Matara again.”

Now, look here you bastards…They definitely intend for me to sit down calmly and listen to these provocations, huh? “Hey, you’ve already signed your contract. Why bother objecting now…” I pouted angrily.

Seo Dawon suddenly began to giggle as he looked at my indignant expression. Jung Garam slumped down next to the Mage and stared at his surroundings. “It’s so small…” he sighed.

That alone made me grumpy, but Jung Garam did not stop there. He sat and the sofa and kicked the air with his feet. “I thought I would understand when I saw his status window…I thought he’d be really fucking rich. Dawon hyung loves money, so I thought he seduced him with riches…”

Of course, Jung Garam’s harsh words may be annoying, but they had no particular bite…However, I was a little disappointed that Seo Dawon simply chuckled at my crumpled forehead.

Seo Dawon, you’ve been so nice to me so far…As soon as Jung Garam revived you’re taking his side?

Ahhh…Both of you are so annoying! You all act as you please! I’ve grown attached to both of them in our individual conversations…Now that the two are together, there really was no answer.

[Clack Clack!]

Noticing my agitation, Lackey–my heart’s eternal ally–valiantly clacked in sympathy.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: We finally got to Tsundere Jung Garam!

Thanks to coffintan for the kofi! Still got more bonus chaps to catch up to, but I’m going to take a tiny day’s worth of break~

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Chapter 61

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My skeleton looked at me with upturned eye sockets, as if to say ‘Don’t be upset, I’m here!’ With deep affection in my heart, I patted its smooth skull; Lackey quickly became elated and settled into my arms.

After minutes of giving it lots of love, I raised my head and realized that Seo Dawon had been staring at us for a while. He pointed at Lackey rubbing its forehead into my palm and said something ridiculous, “Hey. Do you think it has separation anxiety?”

“Huh? Who…Lackey?”

“Look behind the sofa?”

Confused, I wandered to the location Seo Dawon indicated with Lackey still dangling from my arms…

Oh my god.

There lay a cushion with its cotton insides torn away and pieces of ripped tissues. I saw Lackey stick out from behind the sofa when I returned home, so there was no doubt that it was the culprit of this mess.

You rascal! What’s wrong with you these days?

“Lackey! Why did you do this?” I said, frustrated.

However, the skeleton didn’t seem to properly understand my words. It only inferred from how my tone raised that I was scolding it; Lackey shrunk in on itself and peered up, pleading ignorance.

What’s wrong with it nowadays, anyway? When the two of us lived together alone…nothing happened when I left it home alone for a short while?

I looked at Dawon, suspecting him of harassing the other servant once again, but I could glean nothing from his expression. Rather, his perplexed face also informed me that he too was wondering if there was something wrong with my skeleton.

“Lackey, status window!” I opened the system to check Lackey’s current mood.

Current Mood: Master’s palm was injured…I can’t see him…The smell of blood…He left! Why?… I don’t want to be left alone……Am I still so useless?

As soon as I read Lackey’s mood, I could make an educated guess at why the poor skeleton has been fussing and acting out.

Come to think of it, I’ve never explained anything to it. From its perspective, its master purposefully cut his own hand. When it rushed to stop me from hurting myself, I disappeared from its grasp–how confused and despairing this situation must be for Lackey…

Besides, just now…

I thought Lackey was just trying to beg for affection by stroking its forehead into my palm…But, after reading its [current mood], I wondered if Lackey was looking for the wound on my palm–checking for breaks in the skin or any other irregularities. Though it had little desire to shake off my arms hugging its body, it still was curious to find traces of my injury…thus it used its forehead…

Haa…

In the end, it seems like I was the cause of Lackey's anxiety.

Though I knew logically that Lackey was at a different level of intelligence compared to Seo Dawon and Jung Garam, I often forgot that fact on a daily basis. Since I understood the skeleton's feelings, I decided to let its tantrum slide without further explanation. "Lackey-ah. I'm not hurt anymore…It's alright."

On one hand, I felt extremely sorry, on the other I was so touched that I could barely say anything else and just hugged it tightly. Lackey couldn't understand my overflowing gratitude and simply tilted its head with a [Clack clack?]

I put Lackey on the floor while I removed the de-cottoned cushion and the tissues. Haa…I have tears in my eyes, seriously.

"Why are you suddenly tearing up?"

I had no explanation for Seo Dawon's absurd question, so I just simply shook my head.

But Seo Dawon crawled with me and started to pick up the garbage together, "Did you find out what's wrong with Lackey? Can you even converse with it?" He asked, persistently.

"No, it's nothing like that…It's just…I got the rough gist of why it's been so upset…"

“So, what’s the reason? It even tried to attack me; I almost smacked it away.”

“Don’t hit it! Do you want to die?”

“???”

There’s no reason to smack such a small baby…

Although, from Seo Dawon’s point of view, maybe there was a reason for his strange hostility with the skeleton. Since he can’t read Lackey’s [current mood] as I can, he has no way of understanding its feelings; instead, he must feel as if he’s living with a rabid dog that’s gotten free of his muzzle.

In addition, ever since Seo Dawon approached me, Lackey began to growl at him. Even before we manage to kill Bae Jaemin, our team might be embroiled in an internal feud.

So, I swallowed a sigh, leaned closer to Seo Dawon, and whispered into his ears. “You’re…smarter than it is, so be the bigger man.”

I thought Lackey should really have been shaped more like a puppy–it sure acts like one. For a skeleton of a human child, it’s a bit lacking in the mental faculties. Though for a dog, it would be considered a genius.

When Seo Dawon heard this, he bowed his head with a mysterious yet pleased expression. He whispered back in kind, “Is that so? But why are you whispering that in my ears?”

“If Lackey hears this, it might feel bad.”

However, Seo Dawon started laughing openly, throwing the ruined cushions in the garbage bins.

What’s so funny about this?

I tried to quiet Seo Dawon, but my eyes met Jung Garam’s, who looked as if he had seen something utterly strange. “You…you don’t know?” The

Treasure Hunter asked.

“Yes….? Know what?”

“You might think you’ve been whispering…But to my ears, I’ve heard everything clearly. Maybe it’s because we’ve signed a contract with you?”

“What?” At first, I couldn’t understand what he was saying, but gradually, as my mind caught up, I could no longer keep my mouth shut. When I was trying to keep quiet, they could hear it all?

Was he implying that my servants could also hear me mumbling to myself? “B-but…Seo Dawon! You knew everything?!”

“About what?”

“A-all of my mumbling…Have you been listening to everything?”I didn’t know if I could believe what Jung Garam said, so I asked my first contractee, Seo Dawon…To my dismay, he nodded nonchalantly! “I could even hear Lee-kyung-ie’s quiet sleep talk.”

“Y-you’re crazy…! Why didn’t you tell me?!”

“I didn’t want to make you feel too self-conscious.” He shrugged his shoulders.

I didn’t appreciate Seo Dawon’s ‘consideration’ one bit! Why didn’t he tell me anything and instead listen in like some pervert?! Is he crazy?!

Despite my shocked expression, Jung Garam did not stop expressing his acerbic opinions. “By the way, you have a lot to say–moaning and groaning under your breath all the time.” [1]

“Y-you…”

“It’s because Lee-kyung-ie doesn’t have many friends. He doesn’t have much experience talking to many people…” Seo Dawon teased.

“Wow…A honmono?” Jung Garam whistled. [2]

Bastard.

What would you know, Seo Dawon? I swallowed curses and hid my fierce gaze with a sweet exterior, staring intensely at the Mage who excitedly teased me.

Then, in a trembling voice, I asked them, “Wha…What else?! Tell me quickly. What else changed after signing a contract with me…!”

However, Jung Garam was the one who answered, bringing the conversation back to a topic I desperately wanted to avoid. “Hey, I’m curious about one thing…Do I really look so cute to you?”

Ack!!!

When I saw Jung Garam’s wicked smile, my face blushed bright red, and I eventually escaped to the bathroom.

Stupid! Stupid!

Did I say all that out loud?

No, that’s not the most important part–did he hear everything?!

“You’re too much! You’ve never once told me that I’m cute.” Seo Dawon called out.

“Ara? After seeing hyung, Choi Lee-kyung didn’t say anything?” Jung Garam replied.

“Of course…He’s muttered a few times that I’m handsome.”

“Oh? Hey, Choi Lee-kyung! I have another question. Who’s cuter, me or Dawon hyung?”

Fuck, fuck, fuck….

Did I say all those things to myself? I’ve been a bit lonely after arriving at the Hub…After being alone with Lackey all day, I’ve developed the habit

of talking to myself.

Ah…I want to die…But if I die, those idiots will probably giggle at me, asking if I'm a newcomer to the spirit world.

Damn!

[Clack Clack!]

Lackey, unaware of my embarrassment, started knocking on the bathroom door, asking to enter. Even though I begged inwardly for it to just leave, the knocks started banging harder. It seemed, from the inside, that the door would crash through.

Inevitably, I was forced to open the door…Not only Lackey but Seo Dawon and Jung Garam all stood in front of the door.

"You did well, Lackey." Seo Dawon's detestable voice was encouraging the skeleton from behind.

I lowered my head and mumbled, "Please, just go away…"

But none of these three so-called servants obeyed my orders.

TL: Ngl, I'd die if I was MC and I knew these two have been listening to me calling them handsome and cute.

Footnotes

1. gives the connotation of complaining but only so that you can hear it. Sort of like a useless and vain complaint. I felt that moaning and groaning was similar enough nuance.
2. A , honmono, is a slang term that means an otaku that other otakus avoid. Ex. a super-fan that would sing anime OSTs in the cinema or bother non-fans with their interests.

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Chapter 62

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In the end, I gave up on my escape and ate some food, ignoring the taunts of my two servants.

When I didn’t respond to them, their impish jokes quickly died down… Strangely, the two didn’t speak to each other if I didn’t stoke the fires of conversation. Awkwardly, silence would reign between us all.

What on earth is wrong with them both? When I recalled the ‘memory playback’ from these two souls, neither seemed to be the shy type.

Before I had summoned Jung Garam, I was worried that the two would begin to alienate me…However, contrary to my expectations, I was more ashamed of the two rankers and the strange distance between them.

“Um…I’m off to do some grocery shopping with Lackey,” I said.

[Clack clack!]

Were they perhaps not talking because of my presence? After finishing up my food, I tried to excuse myself so that the two of them could be alone for some time.

However, as soon as I approached the front door, Seo Dawon and Jung Garam followed close behind. I threw up my hands at them, abandoning my efforts to lace up my shoes. “No! I’m just going with Lackey. You guys..can stay at home.”

“Why?” Seo Dawon asked.

“Am I some guard dog?” Jung Garam’s forehead crumpled.

At the two’s protests, I had no choice but to offer another excuse.”I-it’s not like that…I’m afraid that I’ll be bothering you.”

“Why would I be bothered by Lee-kyung-ie?”

“Haah. Then don’t leave and just stay at home then.”

Seo Dawon just continued to smile genially at me. Jung Garam, though he complained the most, was the first to stand by the front door with his arms crossed, ready to exit. Eventually, unable to find a better excuse, I was forced to lead these three burdens out of my lodgings.

Ah, this wasn’t what I wanted…

But, this was not the end of my woes. As soon as we walked out the door, I saw a bear-like red head loitering outside my compound.

As soon as he heard the door open, he looked back and approached me with a clumsy smile. “Lee-kyung-nim…”

“Sangyoon-ssi?”

What on earth is he doing here?

I paused, flustered. Kim Sangyoon somehow looked a little hurt but bowed his head without any other show of emotions. Then, with a honey-laced voice, “Well…I received a call from Bae Jaemin. He wanted me to deliver this…”

My eyes grew wide at the unexpected news. “From Bae Jaemin?”

“What’s that?” Jung Garam leaped to my side in the blink of an eye and inserted himself in between the Warrior and me…I was a bit embarrassed at the instinctual protection from someone younger than me.

He was probably wary of Kim Sangyoon's rough appearance. Besides, it's his first time seeing the Warrior…I hesitated–at a loss to explain our tenuous relationship…

"It's alright, Garam-ah. That's Lee-kyung-ie's slave," Seo Dawon said casually.

"Huh? Slave?"

"Yeah, but it hasn't been long since he's been enslaved. He's in training right now."

"Oh……Wow. Choi Lee-kyung, I didn't expect something like this from you……You're really something?"

In my hesitation, Seo Dawon intervened and introduced the Warrior to Jung Garam.

The problem was, he only chose highly misleading words, and Jung Garam's eyes began to sparkle strangely.

Damn it, Seo Dawon! I just signed whatever contract you placed in front of me in the first place! This pervert is blaming me for everything he's done!

However, since Kim Sangyoon could not see Seo Dawon's or Jung Garam's ghostly apparition, I could not afford to slap Seo Dawon in the back or shout at him to shut up. I could barely hold back my rising frustration and clenched my fist. "What did Bae Jaemin say?" I asked. First things first, I should check if Sangyoon had anything important to report.

Kim Sangyoon looked around at his surroundings and then came a little closer to me. He answered with a low voice, "He asked…if I had any desires to enter 'HaHae.' He mentioned specifics such as down payment and contract period as well…"

What?! Didn't the gold spoon–what's his name again…that greasy guy–originally mandate Kim Sangyoon's exclusion due to jealousy?

Kim Sangyoon must have read my unspoken question from my raised eyebrows. He immediately added, “Of course, I felt uncomfortable at how drastically he changed his mind…So, then, he mentioned Lee-kyung-nim out of the blue, asking if I’ve been partying with a Necromancer these days…He asked if I had any thoughts of joining his guild with you.”

“Bae Jaemin said that?”

Bae Jaemin talked about me to Kim Sangyoon?

Of course, since Kim Sangyoon is such a famous streamer, there were bound to be many rumors of our recent party formation. I wouldn’t be surprised to hear anyone ask lightly about our relationship…

However, he didn’t stop there and instead continued to offer us a spot in his guild? That’s really strange. Is he planning on ensnaring all the people around me?

A shiver ran up my spine; I couldn’t figure out what exactly Bae Jaemin knew about me…Don’t tell me–did he figure out the link between us and the <Tower of Command>?

Kim Sangyoon continued, leaving me to my silent contemplation. “So, for now, I said I’d ask Lee-kyung-nim and I put off giving a clear answer. What should we do…”

Kim Sangyoon looked down at me, who hadn’t said anything for quite some time, and then, in a strange hurry, he added. “Oh! Of course, it’s not as if I’m tempted to enter HaHae right now. It’s just that undue rejection would make Bae Jaemin suspicious…So, I pretended to be happy and said I’d talk to Lee-kyung-nim.”

With that, he looked at me with tears in his eyes…I nodded, giving him the benefit of the doubt. “I know. You did well,” I replied.

Then, Kim Sangyoon suddenly closed his eyes, as if he were preparing himself for something.

I looked at him with a puzzled expression. After a few seconds, Kim Sangyoon's eyes opened again; the tips of his ears turned bright red. He quickly stepped back and tried to explain himself, "No, It's just…I thought you'd t-touch…I'm sorry."

"Here? Outside?" Jung Garam looked between us, alternating between our faces as if he was watching something intriguing.

I barely managed to calm my twitching mouth and replied, "I…won't touch you. You said you didn't like it."

I regretted what I said immediately afterward.

Promising not to touch him…Argh! Seriously! Why do I have to even say something like this?

"I think Bae Jaemin is planning something." Seo Dawon's soft voice grounded me back in reality and helped me concentrate on the problem again.

Jung Garam, all traces of laughter now gone from his face, also asked, "Right? Why is he flirting like that with Choi Lee-kyung?"

I approached Kim Sangyoon who was cautiously watching my reactions. "Do you think…Bae Jaemin noticed something?"

"Who knows. First things first, this conversation was held over the phone…I wouldn't know about his expression or any other cues like that. But…"

"But?"

"He asked me for Lee-kyung-nim's number. When I couldn't readily give him what he wanted, he asked me about you. If you've ever talked about him…"

"Mmm…So, what did you say?"

“I just said you haven’t said much about him at all. He just laughed and asked if you’ve ‘cursed’ him a bit…”

Though it seems as if Bae Jaemin had retained no hard feelings and was simply joking with Kim Sangyoon, I could glean he dug for a lot of information through the hapless Warrior.

First of all, wouldn’t he have gotten a rough idea of the nature of the relationship between Kim Sangyoon and me? Though he may not have caught onto our contract, there were plenty of other clues–Kim Sangyoon’s careful way of addressing me and the formality he used when calling my name. This would only support Bae Jaemin’s suspicion that ‘Choi Lee-kyung is more than he presents to the world.’

“He said he was going to set up a chance to speak soon…he spoke very amicably.” Kim Sangyoon continued.

“That’s suspicious.”

“Yes……I’ve known Bae Jaemin for a long time…It’s the first time I’ve seen him try so hard to be intimate with someone else. I was pretty shocked.”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: He’s just like an ex that won’t quit…

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Chapter 63

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He followed me so insistently when he first saw me…Was I acting so suspiciously?

To be honest, at that time I was worried that Bae Jaemin may have recognized me and I was overly sensitive–disregarding courtesy in my hurry to avoid any confrontation with him…Since it was just a coincidence that the two of us met, I thought our interaction was just some momentary interest for the Priest. I didn't expect him to reach out to Kim Sangyoon, my party member.

Attracting his attention is a huge issue, though. I needed to hurry and revive all the members of the Red Lotus guild, but now Bae Jaemin was clearly watching me.

My forehead crumpled–I could not know what was truly in that man's heart–whether or not he was plotting something vicious. Suddenly, a heavy weight thudded on both my shoulders, shocking me. However, when I heard a familiar voice over my head, I calmed down.

It was Seo Dawon.

"I think we need to move the plan up a little. I smell something fishy." Seo Dawon then turned to me and whispered. "I think it would be better for you to not meet with Bae Jaemin for the time being."

So, I relayed Seo Dawon's advice to Kim Sangyoon. "First….tell him I'm thinking about his offer." Pretending to be troubled and contemplating

his offer would buy more time than refusing him outright. I also did not forget to ask Kim Sangyoon to waste his time.

“It seems our Jaemin-ie is quite free nowadays? Then, I should make him busy……” Seo Dawon muttered, meaningfully.

* * *

Due to Kim Sangyoon’s intel, my impromptu shopping trip was naturally canceled.

However, as he dragged me back into the house, Seo Dawon ordered Kim Sangyoon to go grocery shopping in my stead (although the order was delivered by my mouth, not his). The Warrior rode away in his sports car to buy my daily necessities; in the end, I was left alone with my three servants.

Seo Dawon, our group’s real leader, sat us on the sofa and began to speak earnestly, “Since Bae Jaemin is paying close attention to Lee-kyung-ie, we need to revise some of our plans. We need to continue going to Dungeons and level up without their scrutiny.”

I shrunk a bit, worried that it was my fault, even though I knew that Seo Dawon wasn’t trying to blame me…I nodded shamefully; Jung Garam and Lackey also calmly looked towards Seo Dawon. The Mage met our gaze and continued, “So, to stop him from paying so close attention to us, I’m planning to create an incident over on that side. Lee-kyung-ie probably knows what I’m thinking. During the <Tower of Command>, Bae Jaemin had some collaborators…Garam-ie, you may not know this, since you were separated from us…”

“I know. I saw a strange spearman whom I’ve never seen before.” As Jung Garam replied, he crushed the cushion in his arms–his fierce spirit flared as if to stab the poor thing.

I also frowned, remembering the pain that accompanied the spearman from his memory.

Seo Dawon immediately asked, “What’s your impression of him?”

Jung Garam replied, “He had a huge scar on his face and a large body–although he wasn’t nearly as large as the red-haired guy just now…That’s why I thought he might be a Warrior.”

Listening to Jung Garam, I suddenly thought I recognized the face of the spearman from his memory. I think I’ve seen him around somewhere before signing a contract with the Treasure Hunter…

“Is it this guy?”

But before I could place my finger on it, Seo Dawon first found a picture on my phone. When I saw the image, both Jung Garam and I shouted “Yes!” at the same time.

“What the heck, is this punk famous?” Jung Garam grumbled.

“Lee-kyung-ie and Bae Jaemin ran into each other at the department store before you revived. I got a good look at some of Bae Jaemin’s party at the time. I remembered their faces and looked into them in advance….this man was one such companion.”

Ahh! That’s right! I saw him then……Once I matched face to memory, I couldn’t understand how I could have been so blind–no one else fit that distinctive scar.

There was a big scar in the shape of an X right on his nose, as if a gruesome butterfly was sitting on his face…It was as if he had been skinned in that pattern–the color was lighter and redder than his original skin color, so it stood out significantly. As I looked at that picture, I wondered why he didn’t get rid of that scar using a potion? I was told that small injuries or scars may vanish after just one treatment.

…Did he perhaps receive that scar before he became a user?

My wandering thoughts were interrupted by Jung Garam, who gritted his teeth fiercely beside me. He couldn't take his eyes off the screen and, without hiding his bloodthirst, asked Seo Dawon, "What's this bastard's name?"

"Park Hoseok. And, just as you thought, he's a Warrior. The funny thing is…Park Hoseok was originally a member of the [Red Dragon] guild, but he was recently recruited as the deputy guild master for [HaHae]. This was the only article I could find when I searched for him."

On the screen, a new photo showcased him, wearing a full suit and slicked-back hair, shaking hands with Bae Jaemin.

The photo was titled [New recruitment of [HaHae] guild executives]. Of course, back at the mall, he looked quite close to Bae Jaemin…I was, however, surprised that he wasn't just an executive but a deputy guild master. Did that mean Bae Jaemin had considerable trust in him?

"Furthermore…[Red Dragon] guild was one of the groups that struck us in the back during the <Tower of Command>." Seo Dawon turned off the screen.

I remembered vividly what had happened in Seo Dawon's memory.

At that time, what did Lim Jisoo say to Seo Dawon…? To defeat his one guild, multiple famous guilds all joined hands?

"[Red Dragon] and…[Opera]? Were they already allied with Lim Jisoo and HaHae back then?" I asked.

Seo Dawon nodded and filled in some of the blank spaces. "That's right. And the Virtuoso workshop is also another accomplice. They funded that operation."

"What? Why would Virtuoso…Ah, fuck. Is it because of Choi Kyungsik?" Jung Garam jumped out of his seat. "Didn't hyung give Virtuoso a lot of gold when you stole Choi Kyungsik? And they still joined in?" He stomped his foot in anger.

Of course, I didn’t know the full details between Kyungsik, Seo Dawon, and the Virtuoso workshop’s history…But if what he said was true, wouldn’t that make the workshop a total bully? Receiving payment and still actively cooperating in Red Lotus’s death…Moreover, seeing Seo Dawon smile slightly at Jung Garam’s righteous words, what they said seemed to be the truth. I grew even angrier on their behalf.

Seo Dawon continued to smile and said, chillingly, “Yeah. That’s why I’m going to destroy those three guilds first.”

His confident tone seemed to suggest that this feat was nothing too special…In fact, if anyone else had said it, they would have been uttering pure nonsense.

However, I believed whatever he said would eventually come true. Not only did he save my life back in the <Tower of Command> but he also made Kim Sangyoon, who had been reluctantly employed as my carry, [1] my subordinate.

All this had happened in less than a month. Jung Garam, too, looked steadily at his hyung without any change in expression. I felt that, like me, he had total trust in the Mage.

Reading the mood, Seo Dawon continued without hesitation, “Among them, the only ones we can possibly handle right now is the [Red Dragon] guild.”

“Good. [2] Who should I kill first?”Jung Garam’s face brightened as Seo Dawon revealed his intent to target the [Red Dragon] guild. He probably wanted to attack the spear user after quickly disposing of his former guild.

However, Seo Dawon smiled and shook his head. “For now, rather than that guy…We should deal with the [Red Dragon]’s guild master first.”

“Tsk.” Jung Garam clicked his tongue.

I pieced together the image of the enemy guild master from Seo Dawon’s memories.

Wasn’t he a bit thin and edgy? I think he was also wearing an incredibly tacky cloak…

However, I couldn’t let my guard down despite his amusing appearance. He was someone that wasn’t easily toppled–he carried with him powerful poisons. He was surrounded by at least 10 men that were Sangyoon’s size… How on earth are we supposed to siege that kind of security detail and kill him? As expected, are we planning to use Jung Garam?

Contrary to my expectations, Seo Dawon had not yet finished his explanation. “A long time ago, I received a request from the [Red Dragon] guild master. It wasn’t an official guild to guild request…but a personal contract. I refused.”

“Isn’t the [Red Dragon] guild master…Koo Kyungman?” I asked.

“That’s right. It was Koo Kyungman’s personal contract.”

“What was it about?”

Seo Dawon smiled mysteriously at Jung Garam’s question. “He asked me to kill his older brother.”

TL: Thank you for the Kofi, Nuutz, The last two chapters were pretty short, but please have a bonus chapter anyway!

Footnotes

1. “My carry”, in game terms, means someone who carries you through higher levels or to get good items. It’s what Bae Jaemin is for Ahn Joosung.
2. This word was said in english in the original~

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Chapter 64

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Apart from being rather ruthless, it was also a rather curious request.

I wouldn't contract any random person to kill a family member–he just asked Seo Dawon out of the blue…to kill family at that…Or, perhaps, was Seo Dawon a famous assassin in the underworld?

Jung Garam, after listening to Seo Dawon, was deep in thought. "If you're talking about Koo Kyungman's older brother…No way–Koo Hui-seo?"

Though it was the first time I've ever heard that name, Seo Dawon nodded and replied, "Yeah. Koo Hui-seo."

"How do you kill him?" Jung Garam said, eyes widening as if he heard something ridiculous.

"That's why I refused. Even if it's me…" Seo Dawon trailed off as he noticed that I couldn't follow this conversation. "Ah, is this the first time Lee-kyung-ie's heard of him? Koo Hui-seo is a famous [Dark Mage] amongst the rankers. During my heyday, I was compared to him a lot–perhaps because of my class."

However, even with that short introduction, both the name and class, [Dark Mage], were still unfamiliar to me. I thought I'd have to search it up separately, later.

Fortunately, Seo Dawon made that extra effort unnecessary and added a more detailed explanation. “[Red Dragon] was originally supposed to be inherited by Koo Hui-seo, but after he, left his brother took over. That’s Koo Kyungman…Afterwards, Koo Kyungman had asked me to assassinate his brother thrice, but I’ve refused every single time.”

He requested three times? Then, the brothers must have an incredibly bad relationship…

What I was really curious about, rather than stories of the [Red Dragon], were Kim Hui-seo’s skills.

It was a bit shocking to hear Jung Garam, who seemed so confident, say ‘How do you kill him.’ How should I say this…I found it hard to believe that there would be someone so strong that either Seo Dawon or Jung Garam would not dare attempt an attack on their life.

“S-so…That person? He must be very strong? If you refused that contract…” I asked them without hiding my interest.

Immediately, Seo Dawon tilted his head, and Jung Garam released a perplexed noise.

“Koo Hui-seo was strong, yeah. But he wasn’t stronger than hyung.” Jung Garam squinted his eyes at me. “You don’t think…You thought Dawon hyung refused the contract because he was scared?” He burst into loud cackles.

“Ah, no, that’s not it…” At Garam’s dumbfounded laughter, I shook my hands, trying to give an excuse.

Seo Dawon smirked, “I didn’t refuse because of Koo Hui-seo’s skills… There’s a famous ‘curse’ on him. His mother is a famous witch.”

The Mage then proceeded to tell me the full story…

Apparently, Koo Hui-seo had been suffering from countless assassination attempts ever since he left the [Red Dragon] guild. Since the

guild was founded by a bunch of gangsters, the resulting grudge was considerably persistent.

Even if Koo Hui-seo had dragged the [Red Dragon] guild behind him for years, he became the enemy eldest son after parting ways…That's why, less than a year after leaving, he had sustained a large number of serious injuries.

"That's when Koo Hui-seo's biological mother came forward and put a 'curse' on her son. If you injure or kill her son, the same retribution will fall upon your head. After that, those that even harmed a hair on Koo Hui-seo's head had their heads explode…That's what made him famous."

I couldn't keep my mouth shut–what ferocious love for her child.

Moreover, a curse of that magnitude…Doesn't that make Koo Hui-seo completely invincible? Even if he were to attack first, his opponent wouldn't be able to do much except run away.

"Then, that person…is completely invincible?" I asked.

"You can't go anywhere near him without gear that protects against that curse."

"Ah…Ahh! Then, if you have protective gear, the curse doesn't work?"

"The protective gear protects me when I invoke the curse in an 'unintended attack.'…If you try to kill Koo Hui-seo, the magnitude of retribution might be different. After rumors of the curse spread, a man tried to assassinate Koo Hui-seo clad in legendary protective gear. The moment his dagger touched his target, his head exploded."

"Then, assassination is impossible." Now that I've heard the full story, I could see why Seo Dawon refused to follow through with the contract. Honestly, that contract itself was ridiculous? It's as if he's saying 'I'll pay you a lot, so please kill yourself….'

“Koo Kyungman should have done it himself, why is he asking you….” I grumbled.

“At the time he requested me, I was told that there was a way to nullify the curse. However, it was not a proven method, and I had no desire to go out of my way to tangle myself with Koo Hui-seo’s affairs by killing him…”

Not a proven method…So, the [Red Dragon] leader wanted a guinea pig.

Then, Seo Dawon tucked his chin in slightly and muttered to himself, “But…Koo Kyungman looked so desperate at the time. It didn’t seem like a simple assassination born simply out of jilted feelings…It felt like he was in a state of panic?”

Jung Garam added, confirming Seo Dawon’s hypothesis, “Ah! That’s right! Wasn’t this bastard always incredibly scared of Koo Hui-seo?” After pondering something for a long time, he continued. “I received an invitation for a guild celebration from [Red Dragon] before Koo Hui-seo left…When they were toasting with champagne, I heard the sound of glass breaking–Koo Kyungman had broken his cup.”

Jung Garam didn’t think much about the incident then, but, in retrospect, something had seemed weird. “As soon as everyone noticed the broken cup, he knelt on his knees and pleaded to Koo Hui-seo. Shards of glass pierced his palms…The atmosphere suddenly chilled because of him.”

It was certainly strange for there to be such tension between biological brothers.

Usually, mistakes like that would lead to some teasing–some embarrassment…Ingrained attitudes like that only happen between relationships where hierarchy is thoroughly delineated.

“Uh…That’s definitely weird……” I nodded.

Jung Garam shook his head, “That’s not *_just_* weird. After that, Koo Hui-seo moved as if he were going to help him stand up, but Koo

Kyungman covered his head with his hands. He acted just like someone who was often beaten?"

"Domestic violence…Is that what you're thinking?"

"Well, that's a possibility. Though, Koo Hui-seo looked more… sorrowful than angry? At least, that's how I felt. And usually, the two of them were rumored to have a good relationship…"

Seo Dawon filled in some concluding details, "However, when Koo Hui-seo left [Red Dragon], people gossiped that the two's relationship had drastically deteriorated…Similarly, Koo Kyungman had been advertising assassination contracts on his brother half a year after that divide."

After hearing this story, I was utterly curious as to the real nature of the bond between the two brothers. However, Seo Dawon seemed to be steering our focus on the possibility of a third party–the matter may not be solely a brotherly issue.

Seo Dawon searched something on my cell phone and showed us the screen: Ahn Hospital, a large hospital that specialized in Users located in the hub.

"Apparently, two months before we went to the Tower of Command, Koo Hui-seo was admitted into a VIP suite: undefined coma……But last I checked, I heard that Koo Hui-seo was still housed there? It's a little suspicious, right?"

Seo Dawon flicked to the next photo: a snapshot of Koo Kyungman at the lobby of Ahn hospital. "Koo Kyungman invested a lot of money every year into Ahn hospital after his brother was admitted…Furthermore, Koo Hui-seo's exact whereabouts remain unknown after the hospitalization. I have no clear evidence for my theory, but I think Koo Hui-seo is still alive and confined within this hospital."

I asked one question after thinking through his words, "He's still alive? Didn't you say he's been the target of his brother's assassination contracts?"

“Maybe he’s alive, but not truly living. The hospital is a great facility to comfortably keep people in captivity.”

Because of the curse, he couldn’t afford to kill his brother, so he knocked him unconscious and locked him in the hospital? Then…when Seo Dawon said he’d destabilize the [Red Dragon] guild first…

My ominous prediction was correct; Seo Dawon read my anxious eyes and confirmed my expectations. “We need to go in there and find Koo Hui-seo.”

TL: Does your mama love you if she doesn’t literally make you invincible?

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Chapter 65

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First, we decided to inquire into Ahn Hospital’s VIP rooms.

There were a total of 45 VIP rooms at that hospital; the cheapest among them cost 4 million won per day. It was a jaw-dropping price, but I still had a lot of money remaining after selling the [Barnasiums]. I tried to reserve a VIP hospital room for easy access.

However, when I contacted Ahn Hospital and asked if I could make a reservation for a VIP room, I was informed that all the rooms were currently full. A reservation would only free up after two months.

“Kek. I don’t think we can break through without connections?” Jung Garam, who sat around listening to the call, said. Seo Dawon nodded, thinking the same. Was I the only one who was naively wondering ‘Wow, Users have so much money that they’re willing to pay for something like this…?’

These rooms won’t open with just money?

Jung Garam scratched his head in this embarrassing situation and said, as if he had a brilliant idea, “Then what do we do? Sneak in at night, as expected?”

“Since Koo Hui-seo is there, the [Red Dragon] guild members will be standing on guard.”

In addition, Ahn Hospital's VIP ward was built in a different location from the general ward. It wasn't a system that allowed people to enter and wander into the VIP rooms while pretending to be patients of the general hospital.

As I stood, puzzled by our dilemma, I heard the bell rang outside.

"Uh, I bought the eggs you've mentioned…And the ramen…"

When I opened the door, Kim Sangyoon stood, holding an unfitting plastic bag emblazoned with a mart's logo, with an awkward expression on his face. I was momentarily flustered; I had forgotten all about the Warrior while listening to Koo Hui-seo's story. However, my voice didn't betray that surprise and I naturally said, "Come on in."

But…What on earth was with the size of that plastic bag?

I couldn't quite grasp the bag's size because of Kim Sangyoon's large frame, but when he put it down onto the table, I wondered if he had bought far more than I had asked.

"Just how much did you buy….."

"You asked for me to buy ramen, but I didn't know which brand you liked," he said with a voice that crawled along the floor, pleading.

Even though I thought he had bought far too much, I felt I had no choice but to say, "Thank you……"

After that, the conversation between us died. The situation felt insanely awkward, so I heaved a small sigh and turned my back on him.

Kim Sangyoon wouldn't know it…but, ever since he entered my home, two vengeful ghosts and one skeleton surrounded him in a triangular formation…If only he could see their battle formation, he would feel suffocated…

"H-have I made any mistakes…." Kim Sangyoon looked into my eyes anxiously as soon as he heard my sigh–wondering if reprimand was coming

his way.

I remembered that, after contracting, Servants could hear me talking to myself as clear as if I were shouting. Swallowing back some mutters, I looked back at the Warrior in a hurry. “No! No, it’s all right. Thank you!” I shook his hand.

He then nervously put his hands in front of him and lowered his eyes.

“For now, you can sit down….” I said.

Unbelievably, Kim Sangyoon knelt down on the floor at my words.

There’s a chair at the table and a sofa right behind you! Just why are you doing this?!

“Pffft hahahahahaha!”

Of course, my two servants–my vengeful ghosts–immediately reacted at that sight.

Seo Dawon murmured in awe, “Choi Lee-kyung…what the heck.” Jung Garam grabbed his stomach while he burst into laughter. Lackey only tilted its head, looking up at the Kim Sangyoon who was still taller than it though the Warrior was kneeling.

And I, just watching the whole scene, screamed “No, don’t!” and hurried to raise him to his feet.

An issue arose when Kim Sangyoon reflexively avoided my outstretched hand. As he pulled his upper body back, my hand stretched far enough to affect my stability–I lost my balance.

So, I almost fell on Kim Sangyoon’s body. Fortunately, the two vengeful ghosts–who were originally mocking us from behind–grabbed my shoulders and situated me next to the sofa.

“Look at that lack of balance. Tsk, tsk.”

“Lee-kyung-ah, I can’t take my eyes off you for one second…”

As I regained my bearings, the two of them started talking.

Though the words were spiteful–and I was embarrassed–I couldn’t get angry. I was too thankful to them for catching me (and Kim Sangyoon, who still couldn’t see the others, was still at my feet).

“Argh!” After staring blankly for a while, Kim Sangyoon suddenly pushed my body away with a strange shout.

Unable to react to the unexpected behavior, I fell backwards from the force of his push. Kim Sangyoon didn’t seem to expect this chain of events either, as he seemed surprised when I fell on my back. “I-I’m sorry! Sorry!” he pleaded–complexion pale white.

[Clack!]

“Ack!”

Unfortunately, Lackey had spotted his push. The loyal servant became furious at his actions and bit the back of Kim Sangyoon’s calf.

In addition, when it rushed in to bite the Warrior, Lackey was not in its child-like state, but in its bigger form. I was worried that its powerful jaws would chomp through the leg entirely. Fortunately, I grabbed Lackey’s jaw as soon as it began grinding; the skeleton, appeased, released some of its power.

I held the excitable Lackey in my arms, covered its eyes, and firmly commanded, “No!” Only then did it snuggle into my arms with a purring sound.

After checking over the skeleton, I decided to check on Kim Sangyoon, laying a single step away. Nothing seemed to be bleeding or broken to the naked eye…

“Are you alright?” I asked.

“Yes, yeah…I’m okay….I-I’m sorry. Lee-kyung-nim, you just surprised me…”

“It’s fine. But, seriously, is your leg okay?”

At my question, Kim Sangyoon rolled up the hem of his trousers and showed me the bitten leg. Despite how confidently he displayed his leg, the situation didn’t seem good…The bite marks were so clear; left like this, the leg would clearly bruise.

I scrambled to take a [Low-grade] potion out of my inventory. Since it was my servant’s fault, I wanted to quickly fix this accident.

However, Seo Dawon interrupted me before I could retrieve the potion. “Let’s go to the hospital with Kim Sangyoon.”

I looked back at the Mage–face slack in confusion. Seo Dawon shrugged, “Hey, he’s a famous streamer. Maybe fame will prevail in Ahn hospital?”

At first, I couldn’t understand his meaning, but then I realized it was an extension of our earlier conversation.

I slapped a fist onto my palm. [1]

Ah! The VIP room!

“Um, Sanyoon-ssi….”

“Yes?”

“By any chance…could you make a reservation at the VIP rooms in Ahn Hospital?” I asked.

Kim Sangyoon looked puzzled, but when I said I had to find Koo Hui-seo, he seemed to have gained a determined grit to his expression. “I think I can do that.” He, almost burdensomely, said intensely.

With that, he took his cell phone out and began to call up some contacts. “Hey, it’s me. You’ve been doing well? It’s nothing too much…but didn’t you say that you knew a doctor from Ahn Hospital?”

“…….”

“Do you know that guy’s number? Huh? Ah…I guess that rumor’s spread…I think that’ll happen soon.”

“…….”

“Ah, it’s nothing…I just want to make a reservation and receive some quality care in the VIP ward there…I’m someone that sells his face; I can’t just stay in some general ward~. Uh, uh. That’s right.” [2]

“……..”

“Got it. Thanks.”

After about three more identical calls, Kim Sangyoon’s phone rang.

It was the VIP reservation department at Ahn Hospital that I had called earlier. Kim Sangyoon put his phone on speakerphone to allow me, standing next to him, to also hear the conversation.

[Hello, Kim Sangyoon-nim. My name is Lee Byung-chul, the VIP manager at the hospital. I’m contacting you because I’ve heard you like to reserve a room?]

All too easily, he was admitted the very next day.

When I had contacted them, they had said that all the rooms had been taken) that all the rooms were taken… After listening to the manager’s smooth tongue promising a room tomorrow morning, I was struck by how different our realities were.

Damn it…

TL: The power of popularity…(Also Lackey still best boi)

Thanks for the kofi once again Areli! Here's my bonus chap to you!

Footnotes

1. A common hand gesture that means 'I see!'
2. "Those who make a living by selling their face" = a common moniker for celebrities

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Chapter 66

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The next day, Kim Sangyoon rolled up in front of my house with a black sports car I hadn't seen before.

As I rode in his car, I recalled the phone call from yesterday…Ahn's VIP ward seemed to be more famous for providing premium luxury medical and accommodation services rather than caring for high-risk patients who need intensive care. An Ahn hospital existed outside of the hub as well–their VIP ward housed entertainers and politicians who wanted to take a few days off for medical checkups.

During that call, the comments that flowed out of the ward manager's mouth created a picture that was reminiscent of a luxurious resort rather than a hospital. Kim Sangyoon had asked me quietly, "How many days do you think you'll need?"

Seo Dawon, who had been listening, said, "I think two nights and three days will be enough."

I relayed what he said, and Kim Sangyoon told the manager to reserve a room for two people for two nights and hung up.

Kim Sangyoon's attitude seemed quite rude as the ward manager wasn't finished explaining…But, we weren't close enough for me to point that out…On the contrary, after speaking so bluntly with the other man, he politely asked me "What time should I bring the car tomorrow?" It was quite amazing how he could quickly turn his attitude around.

You really can’t know the human heart……As expected, Kim Sangyoon hadn’t personally changed; it’s just that our positions in the hierarchy have reversed.

“I think we’d better get there early. Please come tomorrow morning at eight.”

“Yes.”

So today, Kim Sangyoon arrived, wearing casual clothes and driving a flat, black sports car.

The sunglasses and the flamboyant shirt on his body made him look like a gangster, but when he quickly stepped onto the porch, personally opened the door, and waited outside for me…he acted a bit like Lackey.

Jung Garam eyed the scene as if he were looking at an idiot. “All the doors are automatic anyway, this is super extra.” [1]

“I guess he wants to look good in front of Lee kyung-ie.” Seo Dawon said.

“But Choi Lee-kyung looks like he’d rather run away?”

Of course, just as Jung Garam said, I was extremely uncomfortable with Kim Sangyoon’s royal treatment.

Even when he was calling for a VIP room yesterday, he didn’t talk like someone asking for favors from another…Even if he takes care of me as if he truly cherishes me right now…if the contract ends, I may be facing assassination…

“Um, so…”

“Yes?”

“I wondered…if you’ve had breakfast. If you’re hungry, please eat this.” As soon as Kim Sangyoon fastened his seat belt, he offered me bread and a warm latte.

I couldn’t refuse such kindness, so I passed him my thanks and slowly placed the bread to my lips. I’m so confused. Is this just more inevitable kowtowing because of the contract? It’s too obvious a flattery for that…

“Lee-kyung-ie’s taking things seriously again.”

“……”

I made eye contact with Seo Dawon through the rearview mirror. He smiled and spoke condescendingly as if he perceived my inner struggles. “Is it because Kim Sangyoon is feeling anxious?”

“Huh? Why?” Jung Garam wondered quietly, as he looked out of the window.

“Kim Sangyoon is tied to Lee-kyung-ie through a [vow of submission]. All that effort to look good in front of his master is because of that contract.”

“Oh…..I just thought Choi Lee-kyung’s taste lied in rice-cake like men like him.” [2]

Is he crazy?

I glared at Jung Garam, trying to compel him to shut up.

But, he snorted at me instead, “If you’re really that nervous, you can just kill him before the end of the contract. Do you want me to do it for you?”

“…….” Of course, I ignored his words and looked forward…but Seo Dawon and Jung Garam sometimes…Those two often treated people like tools to use and dispose of. Though it wasn’t my life on the line, the hairs on the back of my neck still rose in fear.

To be honest…I think Kim Sangyoon and I are in a similar situation. It’s just that I’m more useful than him…

This anxiety has probably been growing ever since Seo Dawon took possession of my body and fought with Lackey.

To me, Lackey is like family; I would never have entertained the thought of breaking its shoulder–like he did–and using Lackey's arm like a handheld weapon. Even though I knew that Lackey was an undead servant and that amount of damage wouldn't cause it pain.

I couldn't fight like that……But Seo Dawon… He easily broke it off and easily utilized it. It's as if he's asking why I care about everything so much in the pursuit of my goal……

The Red Lotus guys in the back seat may think I'm wary of Kim Sangyoon but…The part I'm wary of is not about the possibility of him suddenly turning on me after the contract ends. I was warier of growing emotionally tangled with the man. And that feeling grows worse the more these two servants relentlessly speak scathingly of the poor Warrior……

"Uh, if you're feeling bored, shall I turn on some music?"

"…..yes….well."

When Kim Sangyoon asked if I'd like some music, I thought it was such a relief. Thoughts begin to multiply in the quiet.

As soon as I nodded, he pressed the touchpad with his huge, bear-like hands. His finger pressed the triangle play button, and a loud bang roared through the huge amplifier.

But why was the volume turned up so high? Does he have a reason to rupture his eardrums? Lackey, face snug in my embrace, jolted at the thunderous noise.

"I-I'm sorry." At my surprise, Kim Sangyoon hurried to lower the volume, cold sweat running down his back.

Jung Garam, in the back seat, said, "This bastard…he's the type to roll his windows down and blast obnoxious music." I had to agree with that evaluation.

The music that was being played had a very fast, pop-y beat…I'm not particularly proficient in English, but I could clearly hear '*Fuck!!*' interspersed throughout the song.

Haah…as expected: hip-hop genre…

However, when I saw Kim Sangyoon tap his fingers to the beat on the steering wheel, I just closed my eyes. Let's not talk anymore…

"Shall I lay you down?" Kim Sangyoon must have interpreted my closed eyes as exhaustion.

Well, I didn't mind leaning back, but there were two people in the back seat. I shook my head. The two in the back were souls so they wouldn't obstruct the chair, but it would be cumbersome to see that kind of visual.

Kim Sangyoon rambled, "No, I-I didn't mean anything else…It's not about…It's just purely…Um, you just looked so tired…."

"…….What?" I asked.

"Ah….It's nothing."

What was that? I looked at Kim Sangyoon, confused, but he simply looked stiffly forward, cold sweat trickling down his forehead.

What did he mean by other intentions? After thinking a little, I turned my head, unwilling to ponder more–something correlated with sports cars and reclined seats.

I didn't want to think about it anymore.

* * *

Fortunately, the awkward atmosphere did not last long.

The hospital was closer to my home than I had thought. And because we were heading towards the VIP ward–Ahn Hospital's medical resort complex–there was no traffic on the road.

After checking in at the security office at the entrance, we drove for five minutes alongside a straight forest road. Soon, we arrived in front of a picturesque, red building.

The building's iron gates gently swung open from the middle before the car could pull up inside. Inside, there was a roundabout with a fountain in the middle and a central building fitted with a lobby. We parked the car near that building.

"Welcome! You're Kim Sangyoon-nim, right? My name is Lee Sang-tae, the person in charge of your reservation for the luxury room." As we got out of the car, ten employees in gray uniforms and the suited manager welcomed us, as if they had been waiting for our arrival.

Kim Sangyoon nodded his head without much of a reply; he seemed like he was used to this sort of treatment. Of course, ever since my body grew hair, it's the first time I've ever experienced such luxurious service at a resort like this.

As I stared, frazzled at the sights, I heard Jung Garam and Seo Dawon's conversation behind me.

"Four guards on the way. There are about five armed users alone on this floor. All five are keeping an eye on Kim Sangyoon."

"I think the fourth woman from the front is also a skilled fighter–about as strong as Kim Sangyoon?"

"Yeah. I included her."

At their words, I jolted back into an alert state.

I didn't have time to look around in awe, I needed to quickly find Koo Hui-seo. So, while chasing after the staff guiding us to our room, I tried my

hardest to memorize the surrounding terrain.

TL: Let the awkwardness continue~ Also Seo Dawon's going to have a word soon enough about all this flirting–and right in front of his salad, too.

Footnotes

1. in Korean, or 'over,' is the same as 'extra' in English.
2. Basically a man malleable like rice cake.

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Chapter 67

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I didn’t have to bother, however. When Jung Garam said, “Mapping,” a 3D, bird’s eye view of the current floor in the building appeared in the left corner of our eyes.

On that map, a red dot that seemed to mark our party flickered and moved slowly along the path.

Taken aback at the unexpected skill, I looked back at Jung Garam. I didn’t realize, until later, that the suited guide looked at me strangely as he explained our surroundings, “To the left, we have the fitness center….”

To my great annoyance, the skilled fighter in our entourage–the grey-haired woman in the maid uniform–looked at me before lowering her head. I wondered if I had caught her attention.

“Ah, it’s nothing.” I bowed my head and pretended to focus on the guide’s explanation.

“…On the other side, that door leads to the back garden. There you can find a 120 centimeters deep infinity pool. Visiting hours are until 6 pm…”

I looked closely at Jung Garam’s map, attempting to catch any discrepancies.

That’s when I located the extremely large pool model on the map in the direction pointed out by the manager. I was deeply impressed; this skill…it would be so useful in a dungeon!

“By the way, what’s over there?” In the middle of our tour, Kim Sangyoon pointed with his chin to a small hallway next to the back garden door.

Two users, probably armed, stood guard in front of the hallway. As Kim Sangyoon fielded his question, I checked Jung Garam’s map…the hallway stretched almost endlessly on the hologram.

What kind of hallway is this long?

In addition, at the end of the corridor, there was a space for a small room– an obviously suspicious architecture. When Kim Sangyoon pointed at that hallway, the guide’s professional demeanor fell–that reaction made everything felt more suspicious.

However, the manager immediately resumed his professional expression and replied, “Oh, that way’s connected to a special reagent research lab. Of course, it’s an area that requires some security……”

“There are labs here?”

“Yes, Ah! You won’t be bothered by that complex at all–it’s a place where only researching doctors will pass through, quietly….”

The manager’s explanation was smooth and natural, but…it bothered me still. I’ve already gauged through Jung Garam’s mapping skill that the room at the end of the hallway was far too small for something like a full-fledged lab.

I wasn’t the only one who felt that way. Jung Garam, behind me, sarcastically said, “Ahn Hospital must be studying reagents in a studio apartment, huh?”

Kim Sangyoon simply nodded and moved on, unwilling to out himself as a suspicious individual. He asked no further questions.

After that, I listened to more introductions of various facilities and services without interruption. The guide smoothly explained the various

amenities provided, pointed out aspects of the luxurious interior and guided us to the room.

“Thank you so much. If you need anything else, please feel free to page me. I hope you’ll have an amazing stay.” The tour ended at our room, and he handed us the key.

After making some final checks of the condition of the room, he gave us his final greetings and disappeared.

When the door closed, Seo Dawon said, “Send Kim Sangyoon towards that hallway.”

I looked at the Warrior, “Back then…the hallway next to the back garden…I think Sangyoon-nim will have to check it out.”

Kim Sangyoon also nodded, “As expected, it was the most suspicious place?” Then, he seemed to remember something and asked, “By the way… how should I get access to that place? I’ll be subdued if I try to make a fuss.”

“That’s….” I looked towards Seo Dawon.

Seo Dawon met my eyes, and he pointed to himself. And then, as if to shush me, he used his other hand to place his index finger over my lips.

I guess that means…to stay quiet–he’ll figure something out himself?

“I’ll have…someone who can help. Um…You’ll probably figure it out when you get there.”

“I understand”

I looked at Seo Dawon; fortunately, he seemed to agree with my interpretation of his charades.

Though I didn’t tell him directly, Kim Sangyoon guessed that my helper would be Seo Dawon. “This time around, will *he* be helping too?”

Since Seo Dawon didn’t gesture to keep anything a secret, I simply nodded, confirming his theory.

But if Kim Sangyoon and Seo Dawon are going to move together…what am I supposed to be doing with Jung Garam here? Are we some sort of diversion tactic?

“Originally, we were all supposed to go to the first-floor hallway… Strangely, some parts of the map were blocked when we moved up the floors?” Jung Garam said, as if he read my mind, zooming in and out of the holographic representation of the hospital.

I didn’t notice it until Jung Garam explained it, but he showcased some sections on the third floor–where our room was located–that were blurry as if the map’s pixels were broken. “This usually happens when [anti-vision] spells that block [mapping] are at work…But it’s damn expensive to use as security for buildings like this one. Usually, these high-level security skills are reserved for military units…To use something like this for a mere hospital–something smells fishy.”

So, what you’re saying is that there are [anti-vision] protections inlaid in certain sections on this floor to nullify probes and obscure the hospital layout? I looked closely at some of the sections that seemed badly shattered–almost hazy white.

These places were areas that we passed while being guided by the manager…I didn’t feel anything particularly strange? To be exact, I felt there was no place that could hide any kind of special facility?

Besides, why would they only have [anti-vision] on this floor…? Why wouldn’t they cover the suspicious hallway on the first floor with that protective skill?

My question seemed to show itself on my face.

Seo Dawon looked at my overwhelmed expression and explained, “So, the first floor is likely a bait. The fact that they have security personnel placed there also draws attention…”

They’re going to go there in spite of all that?

When I looked as if I still didn’t understand his motive, Seo Dawon laughed, “I can’t send Lee-kyung-ie to a trap!”

Jung Garam bluntly added, “We just need to check if Koo Hui-seo is kept in the spaces hidden by [Anti-vision]. Furthermore, if you can just remove the [anti-vision] ‘skill anchor from that location, the skill will be immediately destroyed. If you’re lucky, you won’t be detected.”

So the plan, to summarize, was like this:

When the day grows dark, Seo Dawon and Kim Sangyoon will sneak into the first-floor hallway to check for Koo Hui-seo. Jung Garam and I will rummage through this floor’s anti-vision blind spots. The first team to find Koo Hui-seo will contact the other through the system [message] app.

Since the first floor corridor, Kim Sangyoon’s responsibility, had a high chance of being a trap manned by skilled Users, Seo Dawon will accompany him in a [summoned] state, in case of emergency. Also, a Mage’s magic was crucial in hiding a person of Kim Sangyoon’s size.

Besides, Seo Dawon is known as a dead person–if the two are caught, one advantage would be that the enemy would find it hard to identify the intruder. And…It’s not like I could help if those two get into a battle with armed personnel over there…

Instead, Jung Garam and I will stay on this floor to dispel the [anti vision], and, if Koo Hui-seo truly is on this floor, we’ll contact the other group straightaway.

There were fewer guards on this floor than on the first. Jung Garam said that the [anti-vision] effect can be resolved by finding and moving items anchoring the skill. Usually, these items are disguised as ornaments or decorations–if anything stands out, we could simply try and move them around…

Maybe the reality of the situation hadn't hit me yet, but I wasn't too nervous since I had Jung Garam by my side. However, I was a little worried about Kim Sangyoon traveling with Seo Dawon…If something were to go wrong, I wondered if Seo Dawon would bother to save the Warrior.

"Kim Sangyoon….you can't abandon him," I told him, while the Warrior left for a bathroom break.

"What the heck, you want me to be jealous…?" Seo Dawon did not give me a definite answer and instead said something so confusing.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL:
Seo Dawon: "I'm jealous"
Choi Lee-kyung: "What could this mean…?"

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We stayed peacefully in our rooms and didn't leave until nightfall.

We were worried that we'd draw undue attention if we left for dinner (since Kim Sangyoon stands out), so we solved that problem through room service. While we were eating, the two vengeful ghosts whispered to each other in low voices, plotting and revising a route with the map.

"Or, just send Kim Sangyoon into the hallway first. Hyung can approach from the other side…"

"Hm, We could do that…But it depends on whether Kim Sangyoon can last five minutes until I arrive."

"Let's put that on hold then. How about you both go through the entrance…"

Of course, at this point, Seo Dawon and Jung Garam have yet to manifest themselves, so I was the only one listening carefully to their planning.

And this [mapping skill]…It seems that view of the hologram wasn't shared with Kim Sangyoon….? Can only the Necromancer and his servants see it?

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Mapping…Can Kim Sangyoon not see it?]

[**Seo Dawon:** Nah, though it's possible after party invite]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** So, not now?]

[**Jung Garam:** Uhuh]

Through the [message] app, I was told that skills can be shared with party invitations. That's a relief…Kim Sangyoon's specs were low in the first place, so it'll be exhausting if his vision was not augmented.

During this conversation, I locked eyes with the Warrior without much intent…He suddenly asked me a question, "Um…Lee-kyung-nim…Do you perhaps have accessories or armor enchanted with [Shield]?"

"What? Ah, no…I have a combat uniform…but I don't have any accessories yet."

As soon as Kim Sangyoon opened his mouth, the two servants unnaturally suspended their debate and blatantly stared at us.

Of course, Kim Sangyoon could not see them so he couldn't feel the weight of their stares…As for me, I couldn't help but notice the inexplicably piercing gaze–nervously, I couldn't help but wonder what was running through their minds.

Kim Sangyoon hesitated a little, before speaking with a hint of embarrassment, "Uh, well….I know an old friend who works as an alchemist in an enchanting workshop."

"Ah? Yes…?"

"He had some decent accessories, so I brought them here."

“Yes?”

Then, without allowing me a chance to properly respond, Kim Sangyoon’s arm suddenly disappeared into some midair void. After reappearing, he unfurled his large fist in front of me–nestled in his palm was a necklace with a slightly burdensome [1] design.

How should I say this…It’s honestly a little too flashy for me. Gold filigree in the shape of twisted branches surrounded a transparent, rhombus-shaped jewel…This…would fit a delicate beauty more than me. And don’t tell me…is that jewel a diamond?

“Uh…You’re giving this to me?”

“…….Yes. I think you should have at least one accessory embedded with the [Shield] enchantment. Ah! And it’s not some one-off disposable item; it’s multi-use.”

I hesitated because it looked far too expensive, but Kim Sangyoon continued to explain its function: the shield could be used up to three times. Besides, it was somehow hard to reject this gift.

If I said it was too much here…I felt like he would go cry alone in the bathroom. So I had no choice but to accept that gift with both hands, politely.

[Multi-use Shield Enchantment Necklace. (Product name: White Christmas no. 3)]

Type: Necklace
Rank: Normal
Durability: 100
Equipment Level Restriction: None

Special Skill: Shield (3/3)

Description:

***When a certain threshold of physical damage is inflicted upon the wearer, a shield is automatically created to offset the impact.**

***The Shield can be activated a total of 3 times.**

***The inscribed number will be deducted after each use.**

When my hands grasped the item, a [system message] had popped up.

After reading the description on the [system message], I thought it was a much better item than I had originally imagined. So, I felt even stronger guilt for accepting this present. Disregarding the design, the item's aspects are too good…

But I couldn't really reject it after accepting…I bowed my head in thanks once again. "Really…thank you so much. I don't have anything prepared right now…I'll make sure to rustle up something to give in return next time."

"No! There's no need to reciprocate." He murmured, "How could I dare…" His mutters were somewhat tragic–perhaps I really should buy him something from the money left in my bank account…

"Shall I put it on for you?" The Warrior asked.

"What?"

I didn't expect him to offer to personally adorn my neck with the necklace.

I replied, "Ah, no need! I'll put it on later before we leave!"

Perhaps Kim Sangyoon realized how over the top his offer was, he stopped in the middle of walking towards me. “Yes yes….” He turned and sat back down again–the tips of his ears bright red.

A deathly silence sank its claws into the room.

“It looks like you got a confession, Choi Lee-kyung?” Jung Garam’s smug voice suddenly stabbed me in the back.

I turned my head to glare at him, telling him to knock it off. However, Jung Garam did not just stop at teasing me, but also snatched the necklace from my hands.

Jung Garam wore a monocle–taken from who knows where–and observed the necklace upon the desk with a ferocity that resembled animosity.

[Choi Lee-kyung: What are you doing -_-**]**

I double-checked to make sure Kim Sangyoon was not looking my way before sending a protesting message to Jung Garam…

Jung Garam took off his monocle and threw it into his inventory. “It’s a bit low-quality, but the centerpiece is a mana stone?” He mumbled, reluctantly admiring. “You know mana stones jewelry are way more expensive than gems, right? This would be worth an apartment.”

When I heard that, I was shocked.

The price of an apartment…I expected it to be expensive, but I didn’t know it would run in hundreds of millions. He’s not lying, right??

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** It’s that expensive??]

Ignoring my question, Jung Garam rather calmly evaluated the value, “I guess he’s not a cheapskate.”

This isn’t even in the ballpark of considering him a cheapskate! Who just buys someone an apartment as a gift…? Is it alright for me to receive something like this? To be honest, I expected the necklace to be anywhere from a few thousand to 100 million won–items are usually pricier than normal jewelry. I never imagined it would be at least ten times my expectation.

So, I seriously considered returning it back to the Warrior now… Suddenly, Jung Garam rummaged something out of his inventory and tossed it on the desk next to the table.

A black bracelet threaded with thick beads.

“Hey. Put this on.” Jung Garam brusquely pushed the bracelet with a finger and sent it rolling towards me.

Even before I touched it, I could see its extraordinary shine–so much that I was afraid to handle it…When I froze, Jung Garam crumpled his brow and huffed, “Why aren’t you wearing it?”

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** But]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** I’m okay ^^;;]

I rejected him through a message, trying to calm him down.

But…….

“What do you mean you’re okay! You’re so sloppy, you might as well have good items.” Jung Garam did not back down. “Just grab it and take a look at its data. You were fast to snatch up whatever that boar gave you…” He obstinately grabbed my arm.

Since he is such a cute, young guy, I completely forgot that he is a well-known close-range physical class ranker. I shook my arm with all my strength, but he held it still. I was so surprised at the unbecoming strength that I couldn’t control my expression.

However, when he saw my stunned expression, Jung Garam gave a pleased smirk; he slyly clasped–handcuffed–the bracelet on my wrists.

[Counterlight Anti-Magic Bracelet +10]

Type: Bracelet
Rank: Rare
Durability: 200
Equipment Restriction Level: None

Special Skill: Counterlight (Curse Reflection)

Psychic magic resistance +1,000/+10%

Description:

***It greatly increases the user's resistance to psychic magic**

***User may resist certain curse spells and automatically invoke the 'Counterlight' skill to reflect the curse.**

"Pretty." He teased my dumbfounded face and turned around to return to his original seat. I honestly appreciate you giving me an accessory of this quality and rank but…

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Ah, I said it was fine!–]

The way he gives gifts…it's just too humiliating!

TL: Me, tl'ing this chapter, I'm being fed…competitive dog food…

I also have two bonus chapters to give, but I'm letting the stockpile build up, expect those in a few days~

Footnotes

1. Basically way too much…like it’s uncomfortable to accept

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However, I couldn’t refuse because of the annoying way Jung Garam handed the bracelet over. The Treasure Hunter pierced through my guilt and frustration with logic, “How could you approach someone like Koo Hui-seo without items that counter curses?”

I just assumed that once we found Koo Hui-seo, Seo Dawon or Jung Garam would deal with him…Shamefully, my complacent mindset was called out. In the end, there was nothing I could do but lower my hand to keep the bracelet hidden from view.

“You should wear this necklace too.” Seo Dawon approached me very naturally from behind and hung the necklace around my neck–to the very end, these two guys were acting ridiculously.

What was even more ridiculous was that the necklace that Kim Sangyoon gave me was still within my hands. In short, the necklace I am wearing now was not Kim Sangyoon’s. I didn’t realize that he hung some unidentified necklace around my neck until I saw the updated system message.

[Ciphe’s Glory]

Type: Necklace
Rank: Rare
Durability: 200
Equipment Restriction Level: None

Special Skills:
Perfect Shield (Total Physical Immunity)
‘Return Home’ (Automatic Return) [1]

Description:

***The stored skills will be automatically used for the safety of the User.**

***Exceeding a threshold of physical damage will trigger ‘Perfect Shield,’ invalidating all physical attacks within a 1-meter radius of the User.**

***The User can teleport to a designated location using the ‘Return Home’ function once a day. However, there may be restrictions on movement due to the limitation on magic power consumption depending on the distance traveled.**

“W-what!” I touched my neck in surprise–a totally different texture from the gold filigree necklace that Kim Sangyoon had given me earlier.

No wonder he came and personally tickled my nape…Is he trying to switch the Warrior’s present for his? He moved so naturally that I missed the timing to refuse his gift…

“Huh? Did you call for me?” Kim Sangyoon called.

But I couldn’t even complain to Seo Dawon about his ridiculous action. Kim Sangyoon couldn’t see Seo Dawon, so, if I got angry at thin air, he would think I’m insane.

Eventually, I told Kim Sangyoon, “Ah, it’s nothing…” with a clumsy smile. Just in case he’d notice the bracelet or the new necklace, I quickly stood up and left the room, “I need to use the restroom real quick…”

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Just what do you think you’re doing–]

Seo Dawon sat in one of the lounges next to the room; I glared at him as he audaciously shrugged back. Argh…!! What’s with that American-like reaction?!

“Isn’t it better to have a necklace that can be used permanently as long as it’s recharged rather than a three-use disposable one?” He neatly packaged his logic, arguing that he acted reasonably.

Others might assume that he always thinks of me so devotedly. Does he think I’m ignorant of his desire to be mean to Kim Sangyoon through this strange contest?

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Honestly, if you’re planning to give me something]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Then you should have told me in advance–]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** And Sangyoon-ssi gave me this because he was worried I don’t have some sort of shield. If I wear something different…]

“Why? Does it hurt your heart because it feels like you’re ignoring his sincerity?” Seo Dawon said.

“Pffft!” Jung Garam laughed.

But, it was clear that the two of them were unwilling to consider courtesy or the circumstances of the gift. “If you feel too sorry to return it… give it to me instead. You can say you exchanged that necklace with one of mine.” Seo Dawon proposed an absurd solution.

If you gave someone a gift, would it be kind to say they exchanged that gift the very day it was received? Moreover…at nightfall, Seo Dawon and Kim Sangyoon will move as a team…

Seo Dawon took it a step further, smiling at Kim Sangyoon’s necklace still clutched in my hand. “You’re going to put that on for me, right?”

“You’re shameless.”

Tickling my neck…hanging that necklace…you just did as you pleased.

Jung Garam, who was laughing at the sidelines, suddenly chimed in, “Hey, Choi Lee-kyung…Hyung made that himself.”

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** ??]

“That’s right. I even patented the magic-powered charging circuitry in that necklace.”

“Kim Sangyoon just buys everything with money; Hyung did everything from scratch–from hunting for materials and designing the blueprint… Who’s more sincere now?”

My head started to ache as I saw Jung Garam boldly brag, as if he was the one who made it. The same went for Seo Dawon’s mysterious expression–I couldn’t tell whether or not he was simply teasing or was amused…

Bullshit. What sincerity…

And, what’s even more audacious…when did I ever ask for something so precious? Those guys just adopted this competitive mindset on their own, burdening me with playing mediator…

At first, I was speechless, but I didn’t want to be dragged around like this. I slammed my hand onto the holographic keyboard and sent them a [message].

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Sangyoon-ssi]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** gave me his gift purely because he was worried for my well-being.]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** You two gave yours because you don’t like him.]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** I think the purity of intent is different.]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** kek]

So, I tried to fight back with some mockeries of my own.

However, when Jung Garam saw my message, he said something quite strange. “You’re not going to help Sangyoon-ie when he gets hit? You’re just going to watch him?” Was he responding to someone else?

Perhaps he was influenced by Seo Dawon’s bias and his one-sided interaction with the changed and contracted Warrior. However, discomfort grew in my heart, and I needed to say something to defend the man.

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Kim Sangyoon probably has a girlfriend ^^;; His ex-girlfriend was a super pretty streamer [2]

“HUH? With that kind of face?”

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** I guess it’s a type of face that girls like…]

“Then why does he look like **that** whenever he sees you?”

His question made me speechless–I searched through my memories of my interactions with Kim Sangyoon.

But…I really didn’t know what Jung Garam was talking about? I’m not oblivious–Kim Sangyoon has never made any strange advances towards me.

Rather, I felt that he was worried that I might take his actions as flirting? Whenever he bought me something, he always emphasized his loyalty and denied wanting anything more than acceptance. Besides, only recently has Kim Sangyoon been docile, and it's all because of the [vow of submission]…

Above all, I couldn't imagine that kind of affection from him since my first impression of the man still lingers in my memories. He was never tender in the dungeon either. He was a punk who valued money and was only kind to me when his reputation was in jeopardy.

Jung Garam may have misunderstood his current actions since he didn't know what the Warrior was like before. Or, I guess Kim Sangyoon might have gone insane from the stress of the contract.

But, why does any of this matter?

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Anyway…I don't have any feelings for Kim Sangyoon. If I have to choose, you guys are my priority. I signed a contract to settle your grudges.]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** So don't harass me using Kim Sangyoon as an excuse.]

"When have I ever harassed you? Rather, I've been damn good to you." Of course, Jung Garam had to attack me with his barbed words at least once. But, when I talked about my priorities, this bashful appearance made it worthwhile.

He looked a little shy…The Treasure Hunter had easy to read facial expressions, so I could easily assume his mood. Did he act so mean in order to hear that I valued them more than Kim Sangyoon?

I looked towards Seo Dawon, wondering if he felt the same…As expected, I was met with a blank wall of a face–mysterious.

Maybe it's a relief that Jung Garam was so easy to read. Anyway, the two seemed to have thankfully quieted down, so I wanted to end the conversation here.

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Regarding Kim Sangyoon…Either way, he's still of use to us.]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** It would have taken longer for us to make a reservation here if it weren't for him.]

The word 'useful' was deliberately placed in that sentence. I needed to use an impersonal word like that to break my servants out of their obsession with the man. If I were to paint Kim Sangyoon in a good light, it may rustle their pride…

My intuition seemed to have guided me well: they both remained calm.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: There's too much to talk about in this chapter it's hard to pick one… Lee-kyung's obliviousness to literally everything despite saying he's not

oblivious? Seo Dawon’s peacocking? Jung Garam exposing their DMs where Seo Dawon’s definitely regretting contracting Sangyoon?

Footnotes

1. In the original, Return home was phonetically sounded out in hangul– the Korean language.
2. The original said “Broadcast Jockey, which is a live-streamer in Korea (or more specifically the streaming service known as AfreecaTV)

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Chapter 70

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“Lee-kyung-nim, are you ready?” Kim Sangyoon’s voice cut through the lull that fell on the room.

I cleared my throat, glaring at my punks, “Yes.” Whether or not those two were determined to just finish this mission or knew the depths of my frustration, they stayed silent and sullen.

The awkward atmosphere, however, slightly eased when Seo Dawon called, “Lee-kyung-ah.”

“I’ll summon you, okay?” Taking that tiny olive branch in my heart, I summoned Seo Dawon with more comfort than before. I made sure to store Lackey in the system space before concentrating on the Mage’s name. “Seo Dawon.”

Would you like to summon your servant, ‘Seo Dawon’?

As soon as I confirmed [yes], the room turned from comfortable lukewarm into chilly); Seo Dawon’s presence could be felt quite strongly– an incomparable force compared to his incorporeal form.

Seo Dawon closed his eyes quietly until shadows formed under his feet. The moment he opened his red eyes and met mine, I felt like I was submerged in an icy cold deluge.

“Lee-kyung-ah.” The strange sense of wrongness continued to build as he opened his mouth and spoke, though his voice was low and pleasant… “Invite me to the party.”

His presence was more similar to that of a boss monster you would encounter in a dungeon rather than a normal human.

Of course, he’s classified as an [undead] being, but he’s definitely a person like me…I tabled the thought and hurried to invite him to the party– further thinking along that train of thought might be discourteous to the Mage.

Seo Dawon manifested his status window and began organizing and checking a few things; after a few preparatory measures, he looked at me who was hesitating and unsure of the next course of action.

“Invite Kim Sangyoon to the party too. We’ll be on our way shortly.” He said.

“Yeah……”

Will you invite ‘Kim Sangyoon’ to the party?

‘Kim Sangyoon’ has joined the party.

As soon as the invitation was sent, the system notified me of Kim Sangyoon’s immediate acceptance. Kim Sangyoon ambled out of one of the rooms in the suite and asked, “Are we leaving now—Ack!” He screamed in the middle of his sentence and halted.

“Hey. Long time no see?”

“Seo Dawon-nim….”

The cause of his surprise was, of course, Seo Dawon. To be fair, I could understand his perspective. Kim Sangyoon was beaten quite heavily by the other the last time they met; it wouldn't be a surprise if he formed some trauma.

Of course, since Seo Dawon was the aggressor, his complexion did not change after seeing the Warrior. He simply raised his hand, as if he were getting a close friend. Kim Sangyoon bowed his head in response, gloom settling in his expression. "Hello…" he greeted, mentally already crawling on his knees.

"Hey, I heard that you were bothering Lee-kyung-ie because I wasn't there." Seo Dawon continued to be a problem in his words to Kim Sangyoon.

Just, since when did that happen! I was speechless at this brazen manipulation of reality. "What….." I started to speak, but couldn't continue as I didn't know what to say.

Kim Sangyoon must have felt the same way–he had opened his eyes wide and looked between us. He eventually began to make excuses, cold sweat rolling down his back, a minute after the awkward silence, "Me? I–I didn't…."

"Just kidding. Lee-kyung complimented you, saying how you've gotten nicer."

"I-is that so….I-I'm glad…"

"I was so jealous I almost killed you."

"……."

Why wasn't he saying 'Just kidding,' after that?

I gave Seo Dawon a hard look, asking him to restrain himself, but he ignored me with a strained smile.

Pale as a sheet, Kim Sangyoon was stuck between us and pleaded, “I-it’s all my fault…” He seemed like he was ready to kneel at any moment.

I couldn’t stand seeing him like that. “Stop that….” I had no choice but to protect the forlorn Warrior.

Seo Dawon smiled at me, “Oh, come on. I’m just teasing.” Then, he suddenly approached Kim Sangyoon and whispered in his ear. The Warrior grew pale at whatever he had whispered, and Jung Garam, watching us all from a distance, snorted.

What’s that? Did he just threaten him again?

“Hey! Did you just say something to him?”

“Hm? I just told him to take care in this operation.”

“Y-yes! That’s right!”

What bullshit; even a dog wouldn’t trust those words. But, Kim Sangyoon nodded his head firmly as if his life depended on my acceptance.

In addition, Kim Sangyoon pleaded with his pitiful eyes, ‘Please just ignore this and pass on by,’ so I felt that I couldn’t question them further. His eyes told me that life would become tough for him if I kept standing up for him.

“Well then, we’ll go to the first floor first. I’ll send you a message when we get there.” Seo Dawon said.

“……I’ll make a safe return.”

This wasn’t a situation where I could waste time by intruding on their conversation. There’s a time limit to Seo Dawon’s summon, so the two of them had to move as fast as possible.

In the end, I sighed once and said, “… Please have a safe trip. The both of you.”

* * *

When, in front of the door, Seo Dawon brandished his hand that had a ring, the two of them began to gradually disappear, little by little, until nothing could be seen.

The door opened quietly, as if it had opened on its own. Someone tapped my shoulder, a silent greeting, before the door closed quietly. With an anxious heart, I brought up Jung Garam's map, observing the two blue dots that represented my party members drifting further away from me.

I clenched and relaxed my fists as I watched the dots arrive on the first floor.

As soon as they passed by the armed guards, Jung Garam spoke, "We should go, too. This floor's security guards left for the first floor."

As expected, there must have been skills set in place to sense hidden intruders; even if nothing could be seen, security immediately flocked to that location.

Of course, I wasn't too worried if Seo Dawon was there…but the problem was his summon time limit. He could still access some skills in his incorporeal state, but the capability was noticeably different from his summoned state…I could only hope that everything would be over within the confines of the time limit.

"I'll be right back… If anything happens, squeeze that doll. Got it?"

[Clack…..Clack….]

Just in case someone comes into our room unexpectedly while we're gone, Seo Dawon [polymorphed] Lackey.

So now, Lackey looked like me. If one ignored the fact that his eyes looked a little blank, Lackey now had my face. Looking at my double–my body, I felt like I was having an out-of-body experience.

To counter intruders or nosy visitors that attempted to talk to its disguised form, Lackey held something eerily shaped like a cursed doll within its embrace.

Nghhh… Will this truly be okay? However, we couldn't leave me with a gap in my alibi…

"I'll be back….–Hurk!"

[Clack clack….]

Just as I was about to leave the room, Lackey leaped and hugged me tightly before I could protest. It dropped its head to my chest.

It probably detested the order to remain in this room–to be the only one left behind and far away from its master. With nothing better to do, it attempted to childishly change my mind.

It was… slightly cute, but it was also somewhat scary to see my own body running towards me. Fortunately, after one hug, it didn't whine anymore, and I could exit the room without further delay.

"Wear this." Jung Garam handed me glasses at the doorstep.

"Okay…"

It was the monocle that Jung Garam used to evaluate Kim Sangyoon's necklace earlier. As a [Special Hunter] Jung Garam had the skills to see items that anchored the [antivision] spell. However, I did not have those skills, so I borrowed from him a tool that could appraise items.

On this floor alone, there were about 40 sculptures and paintings that were suspected of being the [anti-vision's] anchor. We decided to separate at the elevator and search each half alone to save time.

[Special Expert Appraisal Monocle]

Type: Glasses (Monocle)
Rank: Rare
Durability: 50
Equipment Restriction Level: None

Special Skill: Appraisal (Max)

Description:

***It helps the user identify items**

***Tells the user about an observable item's rank and skill when they enter the user's line of sight (passive).**

TL: RIP Kim Sangyoon, Seo Dawon will fund your funeral.

I'll also take a break for a day or two after these continual updates~ gonna work on some stuff! Enjoy~

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Chapter 71

Chapter 71

“This monocle…How should I use it?”

“Hook it in place behind your ear and stare at the desired item for three seconds. Then the information should pop up.”

I gripped the monocle–heavier than expected–in my hand and perched it on my right ear.

When I focused on something that was slightly tinged yellow out of the corner of my eyes, an alarm rang. The front door’s information immediately unfolded before my eyes.

[Standard Door]

Thickness: 55mm
Filling: PUR foam
Size: 1,550 X 2,100 mm
Outer frame type: Nonslip aluminum.

Rank: Not applicable (No risk)

Wow…The explanation’s incredibly detailed?

Honestly, regardless of the information content, but a system would identify and inform the User of objects classified as [Items] when these objects are held or touched directly.

Since this monocle is unable to evaluate living creatures or monsters, it simply functions as a more precise and powerful [System message].

Jung Garam observed me appraising all sorts of items in the room before nodding at me. “It didn’t make you dizzy?”

“Umm…I think it’s fine. I got used to it.”

“Then, let’s go.”

At the separation point, we decided to divide the left section for me and the right for Jung Garam…I was in a hurry to rush, worried about the ticking clock, but Jung Garam took the time to mumble shy words of advice.

He brusquely said, as if he didn’t trust me, “If something’s strange, hide or run. Don’t get greedy and try to appraise more items than is safe.” Though his tone was curt, but I felt that he was worried for me in his own way.

I smiled bashfully, “Yeah. Don’t worry too much about me.”

“Who’s worried? I just don’t want things to get annoying.” Jung Garam, chilly demeanor until the bitter end, fiercely turned away and rushed to the end of the hall. I stared blankly at his fast retreat before coming to my senses and turning towards my own section.

There were 23 ornaments on the right and 17 on the left that were scattered throughout the hallway–Jung Garam chose the section with more potential anchors. He had also thought that there was a particularly suspicious structure on the right and relieved me of the pressure of evaluating it…However, it wasn’t a guarantee; I was loath to leisurely move around and quickened my pace.

Because there were more elevators in my half, many Users in maid uniforms passed by…Though the workers did not pay any particular attention to me, I felt like a spy infiltrating the enemy camp alone.

Furthermore, the hallways weren't straight–the path zigzagged from room to room.. The inability to see past these frequent corners made my heart pound.

I briefly fantasized about some unknown assailant popping out at me and asking what I was doing here…When I looked down at the map, Jung Garam was already halfway down his hallway. I quickly grounded myself and used the monocle to observe my surroundings.

[A woman with a parasol in a garden]

Size: 6 units
Producer: Artville
Frame: Silver Frame [eng_note] 'Silver frame' was written in all English in the original! [/efn_note]

This is a printed copy.

Rank: Not Applicable (no risk)

The first thing I noticed was a rather large picture hanging on the left wall…However, after using the monocle, nothing was particularly significant, so I passed it by.

[Orange Crystal Mini-chandelier]

Voltage rating: 220V/60HZ, 2040W

Rank: Not Applicable (no risk)

The small lights hung on the walls were the same.

Also, after walking around for a while, I felt the limitations of the monocle…It wasn't enough to just simply look at the highlighted items; one needed to get close enough for the monocle to recognize and identify the item in question. Something like the large painting was readily viewable from far away, but, in the case of the chandeliers, the item's information did not simply pop up as soon as I stared at it.

In the end, I had to tiptoe close to the wall and stick my face in the light. I almost bumped into a janitor pushing his cart from the opposite side, and I nearly fell to the ground.

In this way, I checked about five more mini chandeliers and other similar printed paintings–like the first one I saw at the entrance to the hallway.

In this way, I checked 16 of the 17 points of interest, but there was no payback. All that remained was a humongous painting at the end of the hallway…

"Excuse me, are you…Lee-kyung-ssi?"

It was then.

A familiar voice suddenly called out to me from behind. I quickly unequipped the monocle and turned towards the speaker.

I made eye contact with a man I shouldn't have met–not here.

"You are…" I began.

"So it is Lee-kyung-ssi! What brings you here?"

It was Bae Jaemin.

He approached me with an affable smile–though I could intuit nothing further from his mysterious expression. I was on the verge of panic, ‘Why is this man here?!’

“Why do you look so surprised?” Bae Jaemin asked as he observed my rigid face.

I smiled and hid the hand holding the monocle behind my back. “Ah, that’s…I was just surprised to meet Bae Jaemin…nim…here. I wasn’t expecting it at all…I’m just a bit surprised.”

“You look like you’ve been caught red-handed?”

“What?”

“Haha, I’m just kidding.”

His jokes made me inwardly swear.

Just how long had he been following behind me? Looking closely at a painting could be passed off as an interest in art, but closely scrutinizing wall lights would be seen as suspicious.

Furthermore, he said I looked like I’d been caught red-handed.

My mouth felt dry–I couldn’t tell if he had truly been joking or if he had been fleshing out his suspicions, probing at me.

Bae Jaemin looked disappointed to see my frozen face and my unwillingness to continue the conversation. “It wasn’t funny?”

“That…….It’s just……I just don’t have anything to say……”

“I guess I’m the only one that’s happy at our reunion…Aren’t you glad to see me, Lee-kyung-ssi?” He slightly pouted his lips. A stranger might mistake this for teasing amongst intimate friends.

But honestly…between him and I…We originally didn’t have such a good relationship for us to make lighthearted small talk and jokes in a place

like this. What kind of person ignores social boundaries like this?

Especially for someone like me that knows of his past deeds…The selfless attitude that he's currently portraying became nothing more than a suspicious and terrifying act. Why would a person like him change his behavior for no reason?

However, I didn't have the courage to tell him, 'We're not that close.' Especially because I had no idea whether or not he'd seen me with my face pressed against the wall lights.

So I smiled awkwardly and laughed like a robot. "Ha.ha.ha. I'm so glad to see you that I'm speechless." I tore into myself internally for such an obviously strange and stupid remark, but Bae Jaemin unexpectedly did not question me about my awkwardness.

Instead, he immediately asked a bothersome question, "Why didn't you call the number I gave you?"

"Uh…It's just…I had no reason to…Also, Bae Jaemin-ssi, you're so busy…Haha."

"Even if I was busy, I could spare at least 10 minutes for you."

"10 minutes…I don't want to steal such valuable time from you…How could I dare…."

"Even several hours spent with Lee-kyung-ssi would not be a waste." He kept countering me before I had even finished speaking.

From a surface glance, he's acting like someone who's desperate to contact me…Why on earth is he acting this way? As expected, is he suspicious of me?

However, is there truly a need to approach a suspect in such a friendly manner? He could just pull some strings behind the scene, violently kidnap me, and harshly interrogate me.

He’s not the type to shy away from sketchy methods…Of all the ways he could approach me, why would he choose to act like this…?

“Are you curious as to why I’m acting like this?” Bae Jaemin asked, as if he had just read my mind. He stabbed right at the heart of the issue, and I missed the timing to deny such thoughts. Eventually, I gathered my courage and looked carefully at him.

When we locked eyes, Bae Jaemin bit his lips, holding back laughter, and muttered. “I’m very curious about Lee-kyung-ssi. Why do you always try to run away like a rabbit whenever you see me…?”

Hold it! What do you mean, rabbit!

I opened my mouth to protest, but Bae Jaemin was one step faster. “I’m curious–you look like someone who knows me well. Even if I treat you well, you put up a lot of barriers…like someone who’s been burned by me once before…”

“……”

Bae Jaemin continued, driving a stake into my speechless body, “We’ve met before, right? Not at the mall…before that.”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I return~ It’s my anniversary so I’m posting this in between going to a few places. Please forgive some of the laxer formatting and lack of editing on my part! (Proofreaders are definitely a godsend~) Also MC is a hamster, not a rabbit~

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Chapter 72

Chapter 72

If we’re talking about previous meetings, I couldn’t think of anything other than the time Bae Jaemin shined a light on me at the <Tower of Command>. Cold sweat dripped down my back.

I couldn’t have known that fateful meeting–less than one second long–would be so deeply engraved within his mind. I hesitated, the chance to lie had already passed; it felt like my thoughts were getting increasingly tangled.

Damn it. How should I concoct a plausible excuse?

[**Seo Dawon:** As expected, the 1st floor was bait. I think it’s on the 2nd floor.]

[**Seo Dawon:** Kim Sangyoon and I both got out without getting caught.]

[**Jung Garam:** Hmm, I guess the security detail that went down will be returning soon.]

[**Jung Garam:** Oi, Choi Lee-kyung]

[**Jung Garam:** Are you still not done? I’m finished.]

[**Jung Garam:** ?]

[**Jung Garam:** Did something happen to him??]

[**Seo Dawon:** I'm coming to you]

My servants' timing could prove to be a huge problem.

They're planning to come to my location…I can't even contact them, either. I had no idea what would happen if those two met Bae Jaemin without any preparation.

In addition, I couldn't ignore what Jung Garam said.

If he couldn't find anything in his section, then the large painting behind me was likely to be the [Anti-vision's] anchor…I had to get rid of Bae Jaemin quickly and check the painting right away, but my mouth began to feel dry and cracked at the thought of dealing with such a large obstacle alone.

It would be dangerous if Bae Jaemin suspects me any more than he already does.

Besides, the staff who were dragging their trays away from us would probably not pass by us any time soon…If he were to place hands on me right now, no one would know.

"Maybe…"I lowered my head to hide my determined expression and pretended to be troubled. In the meantime, I rolled various excuses through my brain, thoughts surfacing and sinking.

He'd probably already conducted a background check on me, right? Didn't he send a scouting offer through Kim Sangyoon?

'Ah, come to think of it…Kim Sangyoon was there.' A bolt of lightning struck my head, and I raised my eyes to meet Bae Jaemin. "Maybe…We may have seen each other at a distance when I was getting carried by Kim Sangyoon…"

“When?”

“….During the raid at the <Tower of Command>.”

His background check must have uncovered my relations with Kim Sangyoon and, to some extent, the [Barnasium] sales. And yet, he’s not trying to kill me and instead approached me, asking if we’ve ever met in the past–asking me to reveal all that I knew…

‘Maybe Bae Jaemin doesn’t actually know everything about me?’

The relationship between the Red Lotus guild and me…The Necromancer contracts…I don’t think he’s placing such pressure on me because of these subjects. If he had those suspicions, he wouldn’t approach me so carelessly…

No matter how much he searched through my past, the identity of my ‘friend’ who supplied me with [Barnasiums] to sell as a third-person avatar would never be revealed. Perhaps that mystery is tugging at him; thus, he approached me first to coax the answer out of me…

I gambled a bit by mentioning the keyword, [Tower of Command]. The admission that we met at the Tower would overlap with his knowledge of how Kim Sangyoon carried me through that raid. I thought it would be safe to talk about that raid, but nothing more.

Bae Jaemin answered, his doubtful expression still plastered in place, “Really? So you’ve never spoken with me before?”

“Yes. I’ve only seen you from far away.”

“And we’ve never seen each other before the [Tower of Command]?”

“Then, why do you keep avoiding me?” Bae Jaemin tilted his head, as if something was bothering him.

I twitched–though my frozen facial muscles did not allow full range of movement–and stammered, “It’s just, well…um…You looked really high-

strung back then at the [Tower of Command]…" Then, acting as if I said something I shouldn't have, I apologized, "I'm so sorry…."

It was an intentional slip of the tongue.

As expected, Bae Jaemin immediately latched onto the lure. "I looked high-strung?"

Then, continuing my act of a man at his wit's end–caught up in an unexpected interrogation, stuttered, "N-no…It's just, when I first saw you…."

"Yes?"

"You didn't allow cameras…nor any filming…so…"

"Me?"

"Y-yes…They said that you requested no pictures in the Dungeon…So, our team left all the equipment behind."

"Ah……"

"So……Uh…To be honest, if someone who acted like that suddenly became so friendly…"

Bae Jaemin, who had been listening carefully, said, "That was because of safety…Ah, I see how this misunderstanding perpetuated." He nodded, chicly.

"No no, I…this is all my own misunderstanding…" I shook my hands quickly and offered a servile bow. Haven't I crafted a situation where, through unfortunate first impressions, I wanted to avoid such a finicky opponent?

Fortunately, my plan seemed to have worked; a gentle smile returned to Bae Jaemin's face. In fact, he looked a bit embarrassed…

Of course, I knew that Bae Jaemin had a wicked heart…but, if I were in the dark, I might have warmed to that clumsy smile that immediately melted this tense atmosphere.

I'm sure Bae Jaemin wasn't truly embarrassed–he must have practiced that smile a hundred or a thousand times.

"I shouldn't have asked so bluntly. Ah, I…when I'm hooked on one theory, I can't think of anything else. I'm so sorry to have troubled you." He neatly offered an apology, "You must have been so offended by my insistence," Bae Jaemin said, acknowledging his strange behavior.

"Ah, it's nothing…You're such a famous Ranker…I understand." I kept shaking my head, trying to comfort him. I looked up into his eyes, deliberately allowing a tinge of envy over his status to color my pupils.

Bae Jaemin's expression was so soft that I thought I had successfully escaped some amount of suspicion.

"So, according to Lee-kyung-ssi…You've never met me before, and it was quite burdensome to be confronted with someone who suddenly acts so intimate…Right? That's why you avoided me and kept running away?"

"Yes…? Ah, yes!"

"So you're just shy?"

"…..yes…I…guess?"

"Ah, then thank goodness. Actually, I wasn't persistently chasing Lee-kyung-ssi around purely because of my suspicions."

"Huh?"

"I sincerely want to get to know Lee-kyung-ssi better. I just wondered, since Lee-kyung-ssi kept running away…But, if you're just shy, wouldn't it be okay for you to be at ease around me now?

How did he arrive at that conclusion?!

My mouth opened and closed like a fish on land; Bae Jaemin approached closer with a smile fixed upon his face, “Why not? We’ve seen each other three times now…Is it still hard to accept each other as a ‘friend?'”

An indescribable pressure was emphasized on the word, ‘friend.’ Bae Jaemin, railroading over my hesitation, bowed his head and whispered into my ear, “You seem to have been very interested in these paintings…I’ve recently become interested in a certain piece. Shall we start talking from there?”

“……”

“It’s a bit much to have a long conversation here…Why don’t we move to my room and share a cup of tea?”

His words were a bolt from the blue.

Damn it…So, he *_was_* watching from behind as I observed the paintings with the monocle. I was unconfident in my ability to control my expression so I lowered my gaze. Since when? Did he also see me scrutinizing the lights? Shit, I can’t tell how much he knows because of that glazed smiling face.

“If you don’t want to, I guess I can’t help it.” Though Bae Jaemin caught me like a rat in his trap, he still aggravatingly shrugged as if I had the upper hand. I can’t believe that someone could smile like that while presenting the other with a choice they can’t refuse…Seriously, how evil.

“….Where is your room?”

In the end, I swallowed a sigh and gave into his silent demands. At my question, Bae Jaemin smiled until his teeth were slightly exposed. He then pointed behind me, “I’m in that far room at the end of the corridor.”

As I followed his fingertips, I noticed a door that I had yet to see since it was hidden by the last painting–the last object I had to check.

“I always stay in that room when I come here. The room is spacious and quiet…”

“……”

“And I quite adore that painting too.”

TL: Bonus chapter, thank you Beverly for the Kofi!

Also Stranger Danger! Don’t go in strange rooms, MC!

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Chapter 73

Chapter 73

Before Bae Jaemin finished speaking, I put the monocles that I had been hiding in my hands into the inventory. Judging by his gaze on my waistline, he must have noticed that I had accessed the inventory…I was grateful that he chose not to question me about it.

Of course, we both knew that many things were better left unsaid between us…If he were to recognize that the monocle had once belonged to Jung Garam, the damage would be too great to fix.

Besides…

“Ha….? Bae Jaemin?” I saw Jung Garam approaching from behind the Priest.

I quickly looked away from Jung Garam’s location, trying not to look so relieved at the prospect of another ally. His high tone pierced my eardrums clearly, “Why is Bae Jaemin here?”

“…….”

“Actually, more important than that, have you been caught by him? No wonder…you weren’t answering the chat.”

“……”

“If we ambush him right now, do you think we can kill him? Ah, shit. You can’t summon me today, right?”

"……"

"I'm right in front of him, but I can't lay a hand on him." Jung Garam lamented regretfully, standing straight in front of Bae Jaemin. I guess now really is the best time for assassination…

However, I've already summoned Seo Dawon. And even if I were to call upon the Treasure hunter, with my current capacity, I wouldn't be able to bring out all of his abilities…It was like a pie in the sky. [1] Jung Garam was also well aware of that fact and did not further complicate the situation by rushing in headfirst.

He just closed his eyes and slowly took deep breaths, muttering soothing words to himself, "Haaa…There'll be another….opportunity…Fuck. We'll get another chance, right?"

"……."

"Ah~ Taking today into account, I'm going to painfully kill him…I'll use all the torture methods I know."

Of course, Bae Jaemin heard none of this creepy conversation and took a step closer to me, grabbing the arm that used to hold the monocle. "You hid everything you wanted to hide, right?"

"……."

Bae Jaemin gave me, who responded only by tensely biting my lips, an elated look and soon reinforced his grip with his strength. Like that, I followed behind him as if I was dragged along…Bae Jaemin took his eyes off me for a short moment as he focused on unlocking the door with his card–I quickly sent Jung Garam a silent signal.

I looked between him and the painting, attempting to convey to him the need to investigate this painting…

"Hey, Bae Jaemin is looking at you." Jung Garam stared at Bae Jaemin without bothering to give any attention to my desperation or the object in

question. I pointedly glared at the picture, ‘Look. At. That!’ but, my efforts were in vain.

Just please stop staring at Bae Jaemin and check the picture! That’s the [anti-vision] anchor!

“Stop looking at me and turn towards Bae Jaemin. He keeps glancing in my direction.” Jung Garam rebuked me for my shifting focus.

Jung Garam, who frustratingly did not spare a single glance at the anchor, finally stepped inside the suite door. Eventually, I was forced to give up and return my gaze forward…

Damn it, Jung Garam! You’ve sold all your focus to Bae Jaemin!

“What are you doing? Come here.” Bae Jaemin only let go of my arm after the door closed behind us. He walked further inside.

Anxiety gripped my body–my rigid legs followed him at a snail’s pace… After we passed through a short corridor, a spacious and open living room came into view; the room was filled with antique wooden furniture, and an elegant carpet lay plush on the floor…

I took a single hesitant step forward. Bae Jaemin, who placed some cups on the white table near the terrace, turned around and beckoned at me, “Why are you so nervous?”

Despite his beckons, I still moved at a slow pace.

This is a situation where I was reluctantly dragged in through threats and coercion–why wouldn’t I be nervous!… He’s such a bully.

As if he divined my inner turmoils and curses, Bae Jaemin soothingly laughed, “Do you think I’d do anything to hurt you?”

“……”

“Hey now…If I were to kill you, would I have called you into my room? It would be a hassle to clean up.”

…Was that meant to be reassuring?

Maybe that was a threat. I managed to pull the corners of my lips up into a grim smile and replied, “It’s not like that.” I was a bit embarrassed because my denial sounded like a goat’s bleat.

Bae Jaemin, who smiled after hearing my answer, opened the refrigerator door and took out a new water bottle. He poured its contents into a kettle and pressed the power button. “What kind of tea would you want? Green tea? Or, perhaps, coffee?”

“…Green tea, please.”

“I guess you don’t drink coffee often?”

“It’s not exactly like that…”

“Then?”

“Hm? Ah….Um…I only drink Lattes”

“Ah, I don’t have milk.”

“It’s alright…I’m fine.”

Then, the simmering sound of water boiling in the kettle filled the silence that settled between us.

In the meantime, Jung Garam searched the room carefully. After watching the Treasure Hunter enter a room beyond the living room–away from my line of sight–I turned to face Bae Jaemin and his perpetual smile.

“Lee-kyung-ssi, at the Tower of Command…I heard you hired Kim Sangyoon to carry you through the raid for one ingredient?” As if he were waiting for my focus to return, he immediately asked me a question as soon as our eyes met.

‘I knew it–he ran a background check…’

I contemplated what to say, but, because I still couldn’t figure out Bae Jaemin’s motive, I decided to answer frankly. His question served to confirm information he had already discovered rather than to uncover anything new.

“Yes, that’s right.” I nodded calmly.

Bae Jaemin tapped the handle of his teacup with his neatly trimmed fingertips. “It was an item specific to necromancers, right?”

“….Yes.”

“Did you get it?”

“Yes…I got it.”

“Are you satisfied with it?”

Is that also part of probing after some peculiarities in my story?

At my hesitation, Bae Jaemin suddenly burst into laughter. Then he twisted his lips in a slightly despicable manner, “This is just…small talk. I have no particular interest in Necromancers.”

“…….”

The nuance ‘Would I, a priest, truly be curious about a necromancer?’ permeated his every word. I teared up a bit, but I continued to lower my head, thinking better of any rash reaction.

“You needed an ingredient for evolution, correct? It’s not much but…I asked because I was reminded of an old dungeoneering friend. He was an alchemist–he suffered through much hardship to create his golem.”

“Ah…Yes, that’s correct. It was an evolution…ingredient.” I couldn’t understand the point of this meandering conversation, though the subject never strayed far from my affairs.

Without prior warning, he suddenly veered the conversation to Lackey. “By the way…I don’t see the skeleton you always carry around?”

“What?”

“You know, the skeleton that’s about…this high?” He gestured to his waist.

“Ah, Lackey…I briefly left it in my room.”

“Your summon’s name is Lackey?” When I heard Bae Jaemin’s counter-question, I wanted to bite my tongue and take back my reflexive answer.

Damn it! Why did I have to go and say its name…

Bae Jaemin glanced at my face–turning red with embarrassment and regret–and muttered a quiet, “Oh?” This time, he spoke without holding back his soft chuckles. “Pfft…That name…Did Lee-kyung-ssi name it?”

“……”

“Cute.”

At his jeer, I bowed my head and clenched my fist tightly, “I just… impulsively…”

The kettle’s switch turned off automatically when the water finished boiling; Bae Jaemin retrieved it, spooned some ground coffee into my cup, and poured water over it. “Ah, that friend also named the golem something funny…What was it? Kyung-sik’s Livelihood?” He smiled faintly. “I guess everyone names things similarly. Kyung-sik used to put his name in literally everything he made…”

“……”

“Do you have any other summons? What are their names?” He sounded as if he were joking, making casual conversation, but I froze at the references he made.

Is he really talking about Choi Kyung-sik? Red Lotus's Choi Kyung-sik? He's just talking about him…so casually like that? After he killed the man by his own machinations?

"Ah, Kyung-sik was my friend's name. He was an alchemist…" Bae Jaemin said, comfortably, as if he were reminiscing about a close friend.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: MC…this is why you don't follow strange men. That conversation was so uncomfortable but my PR and I were dying.

Footnotes

1. It's like rice cake in a picture was the original idiom. Pie in the sky is the closest English substitute–aka something pretty to think about/look at, but ultimately unattainable.

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Chapter 74

Chapter 74

To hide how affected I was at his audacity, I hid my face by lifting the cup of coffee I didn't originally intend to drink.

"Oh? It must be hot…Please, drink it after it cools down."

"….."

Bae Jaemin pretended to be sweet and poured water into my cup. I nodded as if I agreed with him and did as he recommended. But still, I felt nauseous, recalling Choi Kyung-sik and his final moments from Seo Dawon's memories.

Bae Jaemin couldn't possibly be unaware of his death.

Even if Bae Jaemin didn't personally see his end as he was caught up in confronting Jung Garam…His saccharine words were terrifying when compared with how he cruelly asked if all the bodies had been disposed of properly; goosebumps raised all over my arms.

"It tastes good, right?" Bae Jaemin asked.

"…Yes. Very good."

However, I couldn't express my anxiety.

Every time Bae Jaemin asked a question, I responded briefly. The conversation continued that way for quite some time. I reacted soullessly to

each meaning-laden overtures of small talk the Priest flung my way…

Fascinatingly, Bae Jaemin was able to continue the conversation and ask follow-up questions to my short answer–I was unable to remain quiet.

If he had asked overly personal questions, I would have been able to refuse to answer or have the excuse to stay silent as I contemplated my response, but he had ambiguously toed the line. I had no choice but to engage in his small talk, and silence lasted for no longer than three seconds.

“Aha. So, you just became a user?”

“Yes…..”

“Was there anyone around you who’s become a User?”

“Um….I’ve heard a rumor that a classmate I didn’t know very well became a User.”

“Oh? What’s his name?”

“I’ve only ever seen him around… I don’t know…” I don’t know why he always smiled so vibrantly at my unenthusiastic answers, but my lips matched his–the corners of my lips curling upwards, making my cheeks cramp. [1]

Just how long must I deal with this kind of omiai-like atmosphere? [2]

At that moment, Bae Jaemin suddenly pressed, “Then, Lee-kyung-ssi, where did you meet this ‘friend’ of yours?”

“……What?”

“You said you didn’t know anyone here; you don’t belong to a guild nor an agency…I was wondering where you found a friend who could sell dozens of [Barnasiums].”

“…….” Naturally, I was left tongue-tied. Bae Jaemin’s question didn’t seem so simple. With cold sweat running down my back, I stuttered, “T-

that’s…..”

Bae Jaemin observed my growing anxiety with a calm face and mumbled, “As expected, at the [Tower of Command]….?”

…What?

He smirked at my rigid expression, put down the cup he was holding, and looked straight at me. “Lee-kyung-ssi’s past is clean.”

“…….”

He was smiling, but he revealed so casually that he conducted a background check on me.

I continued to guess at his motive, but I became nervous at his straightforward attitude and his blunt reveal of my contradictions…He seemed to relish my expressions, slowly bringing up the cup to his mouth and taking a long sip of coffee. “So maybe…I thought that Lee-kyung-ssi had made a ‘friend’ recently…”

“……”

“Only rankers are able to sell top quality [Barnasiums] in batches…”

“……”

“The most recent place where you could have met with such a Ranker could only have been the Tower of Command. Lee-kyung-ssi, like puzzle pieces falling into place, you were at that raid being carried by Kim Sangyoon, right?

“…….”

“In addition, that person hides himself well and refuses to let me know of his identity…that narrows down the possibilities.”

“……”

“Ah, of course this is all simply guesses so far. It’s not necessarily the truth.” He looked far too confident for his conjectures to be merely wild guesses…His reasoning was horribly accurate. If he were to make a connection to my class, Necromancer, here, it may be easy for him to make a leap of logic and consider those from the Red Lotus guild…

Did I really get discovered so easily?

I didn’t dare return Bae Jaemin’s gaze and stared at my cup instead; my palms under the table were drenched in sweat.

I couldn’t imagine what he would reveal next, so I could only barely restrain the unbridled nervous energy that simmered in my body.

“Lee-kyung-ssi’s friend…I guess they still dislike me a lot.” [3] He sighed and spoke calmly, as if he were blandly reminiscing upon an ex-friend. His strange, conciliatory words struck me speechless.

This….What did this mean?

My ‘friend’ was Seo Dawon…

Is he asking if Seo Dawon dislikes him?

Dislike doesn’t even begin to cover the depths of his displeasure… Because of him, Seo Dawon was murdered, lost the guild that he poured blood, sweat, and tears into, and was made to wander as a vengeful ghost separated from his body…To summarize all of this as merely ‘dislike’…..

Is Bae Jaemin crazy?

I don’t know how Bae Jaemin interpreted my bewildered silence, but he smiled bitterly and fiddled with the handle of his coffee cup. “I’m sure you would find it troublesome to be caught in the middle, but…”

“Yes……?”

“But…They’ve refused to communicate with me. Even if I want to apologize, I have no means to contact them…But now, I’ve gotten to know

you.”

“……”

I couldn’t understand the rapidly changing line of thought.

Right now…I think Bae Jaemin is operating under some huge misunderstanding?

After we parted ways last time, he conducted a thorough background check…But, instead of connecting the lines between Necromancer, Tower of Command, and the Red Lotus Guild, he seemed to be suspecting a partnership between me and a ‘Ranker’ who had also attended the recent raid–one who must not be on good terms with him. Perhaps he connected the suspicious origins of the [Barnasiums] with that ‘Ranker?’

Who the hell are they?

In order to obscure our plans, wouldn’t it be better to reinforce Bae Jaemin’s faulty reasoning…?

However,the conversation alone did not give a clue as to who Bae Jaemin suspected; even if I were to lie, I lacked the sauce. [4] To make matters worse, it seems he wanted me to contribute to the conversation; the longer the silence, the more inscrutable the atmosphere became.

In the end, after meeting Bae Jaemin’s gaze for the third time after looking away, I predicted that, even if all the coffee in this room was drunk, the interrogation would not finish without some input from me. “He….That person….”

“Yes.”

“He still…has yet to let go of his…anger….” I looked at Bae Jaemin; he smiled bitterly and nodded–he looked as if he had expected this foregone conclusion.

“That hyung is particularly FM-like.” Bae Jaemin sighed. [5]

I was so afraid he’d suddenly ask for me to confirm the other’s name–I felt that my head would explode. It would have been nice to know the Rankers’ personalities or know who exactly had history or intimacy with Bae Jaemin…But, no matter how hard I thought, my mind only thought of the Red Lotus guild members.

Fortunately, rather than to press me on the man’s identity, Bae Jaemin… spoke as if he were conversing with that ‘mysterious ranker’ backing me–he spoke more freely, wistfulness coloring his tone. I stayed wary–there were many points to respond to and, thus, many pitfalls to fall into. “Well, there’s nothing I can do if he’s still regretful…”

“Ah……yes.”

“But that’s a more personal matter…I’d rather ask why he was so against the official registration of the guild.”

“Ahhh….”

Looking into his eyes, I realized Bae Jaemin had finally reached the point of his inquiry after a lengthy and twisted path.

So that means…The Ranker in question has some authority…That mysterious someone feels…pity for Bae Jaemin? By the way, what does he mean by protesting against the official registration of the guild? The HaHae guild? They’ve already held a press conference to announce the official launch, haven’t they?

However, I couldn’t afford to show any signs of burning curiosity, so I rubbed my hands, pretending to be helpless and trying to back out of this dangerous direction. “You know, I…In fact I’ve just recently gotten to know this person…” I appealed that I was not the best person to help him with his dilemma. If I follow through to the logical conclusion and promise Bae Jaemin an appointment with this unknown Rnker, I may escape today but be in deeper waters the next time we meet…

Bae Jaemin, though, continued to speak before I had fully voiced my excuses, “Since you’re here with me now…I’d appreciate it if you told me where you planned to eat tonight.”

TL: NGL, I was pretty tense when I thought MC was discovered.

Footnotes

1. The phrase used here was originally “I only know his face, aka, that they were acquaintances.
2. Omiai was originally something like a “marriage meeting” in the original. I felt that the readers would be more familiar with the term omiai. The two are essentially the same: arranged dates to figure out if both parties would be compatible for marriage.
3. Korean doesn’t really use pronouns, and often the gender of subjects can be vague. In this case, this is on purpose, so I decided to use “they” as a gender neutral pronoun.
4. The original actually does say sauce, referring to the internet slang source = sauce. When you see an unknown series in the comment sections of manga websites, you ask for sauce!
5. FM stands for field manual. It’s slang for people who steadfastly follow the rules, but not in a good way. A stick in the mud, essentially.

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Chapter 75

Chapter 75

He wants me to tell him where I plan to eat?

There was a restaurant on the first floor of this building. I remember hearing about it on the guided tour…

The problem was that there were more than 1 or 2 restaurants in this complex–in fact, there were around 5 eateries in this building alone. Furthermore, the guests here are not restricted to eating in this resort hospital. Since it's located not far from downtown, there were many other nearby restaurants.

'I'm going crazy…' I frowned, acting as if I was thinking about future plans, careful not to bite my lips. While buying time, I continued to inwardly assess the situation.

I needed to choose where this faceless, nameless person would want to eat today. All I could depend on was Bae Jaemin's testimony that he's got an FM personality!

Haah…What do FMs eat?

God damn it, how am I supposed to know?! If I could somehow divine that, would I be suffering as a Necromancer now?

Crash–!

Fortunately, at that time, a strange sound erupted in the room that Jung Garam had entered.

It sounded like a pile of books had toppled to the floor…Bae Jaemin, who had been leaning leisurely against the back of the sofa across from me, stood up as soon as he heard the noise and headed towards that room.

I assumed that Jung Garam would have caused that noise, but, for now, I acted as if I had no idea what was going on.

“Please wait a moment.” Bae Jaemin disappeared into the living room.

As soon as he could not be seen, I heard Jung Garam’s voice right behind me. “Hey.”

“Ack!……”

Weren’t you *just* in that room earlier?

Surprised by the unexpected appearance, I almost looked back at him, but, fortunately, Jung Garam quickly pressed on my shoulder.

At that very moment, Bae Jaemin stuck his head out. of the living room and looked at me. “Didn’t that sound come from this room?”

“Huh….?”

“Just now. Did you hear it?”

“Ah, Yes! I did hear it…What about it…..?”

“That’s strange. It doesn’t seem like anything has fallen…” Bae Jaemin returned to his original spot near me.

Jung Garam spoke quietly from behind, “Don’t act stupidly and just listen to me, alright?”

“……”

“I just switched off the [Anti-vision] in that room.”

“……”

It was here? Jeez….Then the big painting right outside of this room simply is just a normal painting

Well, Jung Garam is a well known expert in revealing traps and discovering new paths; as soon as he saw the painting, he must have realized that it was unrelated to the [anti-vision].

…..Haah

So everything I did–looking at the lights and the paintings–was useless…

There was no room to wallow in my own futility, however. Jung Garam immediately said, “The ward manager explained to us that the building contained a total of five stories. But there was a floor obscured by [anti-vision]; there’s a half-story between the 3rd and 4th floors. No wonder the ceiling was so uselessly high…”

As he spoke, he pulled up a revised map in front of me. A small new space had appeared halfway up the current floor we were on. Unwilling to be caught by Bae Jaemin, I could only roll my eyes slightly to the side to observe the map.

I’m glad we found the anchor, but…I couldn’t understand why the [anti-vision] anchor was hidden in this room. This was a guest room; what would happen if a visitor inadvertently touches and undermines the spell? The hidden floor would be exposed.

“I didn’t think this was something Koo Kyungman could have pulled off on his own…As expected, Bae Jaemin was also involved.” As soon as I formulated my questions, Jung Garam also muttered as if he read my mind. I then realized that this room would never be assigned to ordinary guests.

“I always stay in that room when I come here. The room is spacious and quiet…”

I remembered what Bae Jaemin had said when we first met in the hallway. At that time, I had thought it was no more than a passing remark…

However, I couldn’t afford to think for too long. Bae Jaemin smiled, seemingly tired of this circumventive conversation. He asked me, point blank, “Hmm, Do you need more time to think? Or…is there anything else you wanted?”

Damn it…

Of course, even if I noticed his participation in this scheme, that knowledge wouldn’t help me with Bae Jaemin’s question now. I drank all the cooled coffee in my cup and focused my thoughts back on our previous topic. If careless, I could possibly be trapped in this room like Koo Hui-seo without a bird or mouse to witness my misfortune.

“I think he’s talking about Moon Issak. Just say any restaurant.” This time, Jung Garam could back me up. I was momentarily stumped by the unfamiliar name that popped up out of nowhere, but I soon understood that it was related to Bae Jaemin’s and my previous conversation.

But wait…Were you listening to the whole conversation from another room

‘Then, this must be the name of the Ranker that Bae Jaemin had mentioned?’

Jung Garam took the initiative to expand the holographic map to show the names of the restaurants on the first floor. I checked out a Korean Restaurant named [Tea Banquet] and answered while staring straight at Bae Jaemin, “…I think I’ll have dinner at the Tea Banquet.”

“Good.” At my answer, Bae Jaemin smiled broadly once more.

My heart felt tight at the beautiful face. He looked like a pretty boy , half hidden by the eye patch, with a sweet demeanor.

As expected, people shouldn’t be judged by their appearances. How many things have you hidden with that seemingly harmless smile….?

“Then, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Bae Jaemin said.

“….Yes.”

“Please don’t be too nervous. I’ll just coincidentally drop by tomorrow…I won’t cause trouble for Lee-kyung-ssi at the [Tea Banquet].”

That means he’s going to pretend to not recognize me? I got up from my seat, nodding my head to show that I understood.

Bae Jaemin followed as if to escort me out. He passed by me to reach the door first; his palm unfolded and turned the door knob. Briefly, a blue spark popped up from his touch; I was surprised, though my face betrayed no emotion.

Jung Garam saw that spark and clicked his tongue, “This place is like a safe…”

This place…If I came here without Jung Garam, I might not have seen the outside world again. I would have been stuck, unable to leave dead or alive…

“If you’re bored, please come again…Feel free to spend the night as well.” Whether he knew I was scared or not, Bae Jaemin opened the door with his usual smile, spouting absolute nonsense. I did not answer and walked straight into the hallway.

Though I knew it seemed as if I was running away with my tail between my legs, I was unable to look back even once. That’s because I couldn’t hear the door close until the end of the hallway.

When I arrived at my room, cold sweat rained down my back.

* * *

“Moon Issak is here?”

“Yeah. That guy whined to Lee-kyung because he wouldn’t permit the guild to official form?”

“He thinks Lee-kyung-ie’s on Moon Lee-sak’s side?”

“Probably?”

With me buried in the bed between them, Seo Dawon, who was back in his incorporeal form, and Jung Garam exchanged intel above my head.

The tension and anxiety only released when I stepped foot inside my room…When I knocked on the door, I was so surprised to see Lackey rush at me with my own face, that my legs gave way. At that moment, Seo Dawon rushed to help me to my feet…

Even now, while speaking with Jung Garam, Seo Dawon sat next to my face-down body and placed a cool hand on my head, checking my temperature. I was a bit bothered by the concern, but I had no energy to tell him to stop…And, it wasn’t as if the cold touch felt bad…

I felt, once again, that the servants were different from other humans. Though his hand had been placed on my forehead for quite some while, it had yet to warm up. It was as if his fingers were covered in chilly winds. I thought, randomly, ‘Can he feel the cold?’

“….By the way, Why is Lee-kyung-ie so spiritless?” Seo Dawon asked.

“Bae Jaemin was toying around with him.”

“Threatening him?”

“Ah, fuck if I know. But you know, I finished this super quickly. It was hard to finish everything before Lee-kyung-ie cried.”

I was slightly annoyed at Jung Garam’s humiliating depiction–crying at a single touch and begging for mercy. Honestly, though, I really wanted to cry at that time. So I closed my eyes, tamped down my crankiness, and pretended to ignore the two.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Thank you for kofi-supporter for the coffee~ This bonus chapter is for you!

Bae Jaemin: Feel free to spend the night 😉

Seo Dawon: I feel a disturbance in the force.

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Chapter 76

Chapter 76

I didn’t cry. I wasn’t even close to crying.” Still, I lost my temper and shot back.

Jung Garam snorted, “I think I understand why Bae Jaemin had so much fun seeing you twitch.”

However, unexpectedly, Seo Dawon defended me. “It’s because Lee-kyung-ie encountered Bae Jaemin back at the Tower of Command. Also, he sees the memories of the dead every time he signs a contract…He says it feels like he’s possessed the person involved.”

Jung Garam stared at me for a moment, “I’m the one who got done in, but why is he the one that’s making a fuss…” He grumbled but ceased his teasing.

In fact, the skill to revive the dead required me to view their last moments. Briefly assimilating with the dead left a significant impact on me–it’s not some random memory, after all, but the very moment they are killed. I even threw up after Seo Dawon’s contract.

However, I couldn’t exactly express to these two that I was in pain because of their memories…After all, that’s not what you should say to the ones that actually died…

“How are we going to engineer a meeting between Moon Issak and Bae Jaemin?” I changed the topic.

“We’ll have to send Kim Sangyoon.” Seo Dawon answered straight away, as if he had already thought ahead.

Sangyoon-ssi…?

“How’s that going to work? Do they know each other?”

“Of course not. Moon Issak never socializes.”

“He’s a total psycho.” Jung Garam added.

Ah, I think the reviews from my servants are way worse than Bae Jaemin’s…Just who is this person that’s supposedly a stickler for rules, unsociable, and yet, according to Jung Garam, a psycho?

“Um…This Moon Issak person…What does he do?” I asked curiously.

Seo Dawon and Jung Garam opened their mouths at the same time, “He’s the youngest executive secretary of the Korean Dungeon Association.”

“That guy. He’s one strict old soul,” Seo Dawon shook his head. “He is such a fastidious man that during the Red Lotus’s heyday we often got fucked over by him.” [1]

I couldn’t believe that such a stick in the mud would not get cowed by the Rankers but, instead, manage to attack them instead…How on earth did Moon Issak pull that off?

In addition, the [Korean Dungeon Association] was the foremost–and highest in the hierarchy–government agency for Users and Dungeon related matters. The association even directed the police-like organization that caught criminal users. In short, they were the executive branch for Users.

If he had risen to the executive secretary position in such a highly competitive place, he must be competent…

“But…Can Sangyoon-ssi really mark a person like that?” [2] I wondered if Kim Sangyoon could handle someone like that.

Seo Dawon succinctly answered, “Of course not.”

“Ah, then?…What then?”

“So, I’m sending him in together with Garam-ie.”

Huh…but Kim Sangyoon can’t see Jung Garam, right?

And given Jung Garam’s crumpled forehead–the young Treasure Hunter standing to the side with a sullen expression–Seo Dawon must not have discussed this plan in advance. Unexpectedly, Jung Garam did not protest; his pouting lips were uncharacteristically quiet.

“Garam-ie will observe the situation, check in with me, and I’ll communicate with Kim Sangyoon. That guy doesn’t have to know that Garam’s been revived just yet…If those two are in a pinch, I’ll intervene as well to hide all traces of Garam’s presence.”

“Okay.” I also thought that either Seo Dawon or Jung Garam should accompany the Warrior, so I had no specific complaints.

After organizing the party divisions simply and quickly, Seo Dawon looked at Lackey, wriggling at my feet. “Lackey will pretend to be Lee-kyung-ie in this room again.”

[Clack clack.]

Lackey seemed to respond to Seo Dawon’s voice before, soon losing interest and laying on the ground, tearing off bits of the carpet. Still, I was relieved that it didn’t seem to react too sensitively besides its lukewarm reaction. The skeleton dutifully stayed within this room without escaping as well.

So then…Seo Dawon and I were the only ones left…

Would he and I go together to find Koo Hui-seo? Seo Dawon confirmed my guess and ordered me to move with him.

After dividing our roles, we shared examples of situations that might arise and gave our opinions on how to deal with them. First, it would normally be difficult to find Moon Issak, but fortunately, this problem was easily solved by Jung Garam's ability.

"So, I went to the hallway opposite to Choi Lee-kyung during the search, earlier."

"Ah, yeah?"

"The maids were all sweeping and cleaning with the doors wide open there…all except for one room which left its door closed. That room was marked with a 'Do Not Disturb' sign." Jung Garam shrugged, indicating that the closed room must be Moon Issak's. That theory seemed plausible– Bae Jaemin might have been further misled as we reserved a room on the same floor as this man.

Furthermore, only our floor and the floor below were in operation in this annex. The upper floor was more luxurious–and therefore more expensive; I don't think a person of Moon Issak's station would reserve a cheaper room downstairs…

Jung Garam, while searching for the [anti-vision] anchor, sprayed an item called the [Ten Thousand Li Perfume] in front of that door, in case of an emergency. [3]

The [Ten Thousand Li Perfume] was a scented spray normally used for shadowing or tracking–a peculiar item that could only be detected by its user. No matter where the target may be, the user could trace this scent back to them.

Of course, since Jung Garam was currently an incorporeal soul, he would not be so easily detected by others. However, if one put the [Ten Thousand Li Perfume] on the door, he could be alerted if the person inside were to leave and approach his location.

Fortunately, the [Ten Thousand Li Perfume] was not activated while Jung Garam was exploring earlier, but, once sprayed, the item would last for three days. He would be able to track whoever stepped out of that room in that time frame.

“We can accurately determine the timing of when Moon Issak leaves his room. Once he steps through that door, we can monitor his movements on my map.”

Thanks to his quick thinking, we could avoid waiting for him outside his room all day. However, inviting him to eat at [Tea Banquet] together was another matter.

“Is there a possibility that Sangyoon-ssi knows Moon Issak?”

From the way he made a few phone calls to grab a reservation at this hospital, it seems as if he knows a fair amount of people…

However, both Jung Garam and Seo Dawon looked skeptical when I asked Kim Sangyoon in the next room over.

“I’ve seen him once…I’ve never held a conversation with him nor gotten his personal contact, though.” The Warrior said.

“Ah…So then I guess it’s difficult for you to invite him to dinner?”

“W-what? Invite him to dinner?” Kim Sangyoon looked down at me with an anxious expression and fidgeted his large hands. “Um, Moon Issak….Uh…His personality is a bit…” He hesitated.

Just how horrid is this man for someone like Kim Sangyoon to disparage his character? Perhaps I was just ignorant, Moon Issak was famous enough that Kim Sangyoon, who had never spoken to him once, already knew about his character.

Kim Sangyoon did not stop there; he looked around and bowed his head, whispering to me, “I heard…that Seo Dawon also had an *impressive* personality back in the days.”

“Yes…..Eh?”

“Moon Issak was called the ‘Seo Dawon of the civil service department’…. Well, rumors like that were plentiful. He was arrogant and didn’t treat others well, picky, and was prone to rioting…”

“I-I see…”

The problem was that Seo Dawon and Jung Garam were not even three steps away from Kim Sangyoon, who was ignorant about the proximity of the subject of his gossip.

Seo Dawon smiled and gave a meaningless exclamation, “Ho~oh?” Jung Garam looked at Kim Sangyoon in excitement, twisting and biting his lips to hold back his laughter.

In this unusual atmosphere, I tried to hurriedly change the subject, but Kim Sangyoon finally drove the nail in the coffin. “However big Moon Issak’s infamy may be, it couldn’t possibly be as big as Seo Dawon’s… Hehe.”

“Hahahah!” Laughter erupted out of Jung Garam’s convulsing body.

Kim Sangyoon with bright eyes said, naively, “Um, what I just said now…please keep it a secret from Seo Dawon-nim.”

I nodded my head, but I couldn’t bear to look at him because I felt so sorry for the Warrior.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: RIP Sangyoon again. Good luck at your funeral.

Footnotes

1. = to eat hard taffy. This is slang for “fucked up” in Korean. It’s also used quite vulgarly to tell people to “fuck off” or “fuck you”
2. Marking is a common video game or sports term. It means to take something as your opponent so that others can focus on other things.
3. According to Wikipedia, Li (Chinese: , lǐ, or , shìlǐ), also known as the Chinese mile, is a traditional Chinese unit of distance. The li has varied considerably over time but was usually about one-third of an English mile and now has a standardized length of a half-kilometer (500 meters or 1,640 feet).

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Chapter 77

Chapter 77

In order to save Kim Sangyoon, I asked him to buy some coffee sold on the first floor.

After ignoring his protests that room service would suffice, I sent him on his way. I shook my head at Jung Garam, who was still laughing like crazy, begging him to stop laughing. Of course, no seeds of restraint took root…

“Haah…Kim Sangyoon is extremely funny…” After a while, Jung Garam stretched out on the couch and continued to giggle.

“Sangyoon’s quite cute.” Seo Dawon said, chillingly.

Is that the expression one makes when calling someone cute…?

“I-I don’t think…your personality is that bad…” I tried to gently flatter Seo Dawon–to soothe his ruffled feelings

However, Seo Dawon tilted his head, implying that my words hurt more than they helped. “Not that bad…Is that all? After I was so warm to Lee-kyung-ie?”

“I-I didn’t mean…Your personality is good…Yeah.”

“You wound me…” Seo Dawon stared at me with an expression that betrayed his desire to be mean rather than hurt. He then suddenly stretched my cheeks with both hands, as if he were pinching a child’s cheek.

Of course, once I snapped back to my senses I wanted to immediately remove myself from this humiliating position.

Seo Dawon muttered to himself, “What should I do to soothe this broken heart…”

“Let go…”

“Should we rain punishment and rewards down on Kim Sangyoon until I feel better?”

“……”

“Of course, the one who wounded me was Lee-kyung-ie…But I’m just a lowly servant; how could I dare turn on my master.”

Geez

In the end, I allowed him to knead my cheeks like he was squeezing some slime.

I didn’t want to turn Kim Sangyoon into a dog using the reward/punishment system…If I could relieve his mood by suffering through some pinches and squeezes, then I’d willingly make that sacrifice–though it would be less embarrassing if we could avoid Jung Garam’s stinging gaze. He looked as if he saw an infectious disease carrier…

“As for drawing out Moon Issak, leave it to me.” After playing with me for so long, Seo Dawon must have soothed his aggrieved feelings; he let go of my inflamed cheeks.

I looked towards Seo Dawon–my palms on either side of my face to cool down the heat from my cheeks. “W-what are you going to do?”

“Moon Issak and I have a few things in common. Including. My. Fussy. And. Arrogant. Personality….” He spoke in an emphatic voice. He grinned, “I bet you’re so curious you can’t stand it.”

* * *

The next evening, we gathered together before leaving the room.

The most neatly dressed person in the party was Kim Sangyoon, who wore a clean navy suit without all the burdensome gold accessories he usually wore.

At first glance, he seemed to be a completely different person–he had even let loose his red hair which was usually styled in an updo. Moon Issak was rumoured to hate people that looked like punks or gangsters, so he made an effort to appeal to the man.

“Sangyoon-ssi, you look good in a suit.” I lobbed a simple compliment at his modest style to relieve his tension; the warrior had been fiddling with his collar–tight as a leash–obviously bothered by the unfamiliar outfit.

“Y-yes…” Kim Sangyoon’s face became red at my compliment. He responded with a brown-nosing voice and, fortunately, stood still with his hands now calmly at his sides.

“I’ve already sent the invitation. All he has to do is to stop himself from speaking uselessly.” Jung Garam said curtly and gently pushed the black invitation on the desk with his hand.

I quickly grabbed it and turned to Kim Sangyoon. “This is the invitation. And…It would be best if you spoke as little as possible in front of Moon Issak.”

“Yes!”

The invitation’s true identity was a bait to lure Moon Issak…It contained Jung Garam’s VIP pass to the Black Market–obtained as a reward from achieving the “Matara’s Assassin” title.

<The ‘Matara’s assassin’ title grants you priority on all assassination related contracts. Additionally, you can use the [Black Market]’s VIP ticket at any time.>

Ever since I signed the contract with Jung Garam, I was a bit curious about the [Black Market]–it sounded so impressive…Strangely enough, Jung Garam dismissed it with nothing more than feeble explanation: “It’s just a place to sell things that are a bit questionable to sell elsewhere.”

Seeing my still wondrous expression, he reluctantly continued, “Like…a dragon egg, for example.”

“Whoa…So you could raise a dragon?”

“Am I a tamer?”

“N-no…It’s just…you said they were on sale…”

“That’s why I said it was a place that sold questionable goods at an expensive price to half-wits like you.”

As I stared at him, speechless, Seo Dawon, who was listening at my side, kindly paraphrased. “Black Market merchants sell defective goods or items they can’t guarantee to buyers because they can’t identify it themselves… It’s hard to get a proper product from the [Black Market] unless you know the exact name and have a good eye for appraisal.”

Jung Garam immediately added, “You. Do you know the difference between a La Quézac and a La Quésec?”

“….Rather than…knowing the difference…it’s the first time I’ve heard of them…”

“Hmm, then do you know where Tegak’s horns are from?”

“….No.”

When I couldn’t answer correctly, he shrugged his shoulders, as if he expected me to fail–how annoying…

However, I’ve gauged the vibe of the [Black Market], so I ceased any further questions and returned to the current business at hand. “By the way, is Moon Issak interested in something like that?”

“Since long ago, a rumor had been circulating about Moon Issak searching for an item at the market.”

However, it was impossible to gain access to the [Black Market] without evil-attribute affiliated quests or titles. Users that weren’t so wicked-minded must receive their tickets through acquaintances.

Because Moon Issak was a Holy Knight, one of the pinnacle classes of the holy attribute, he could never acquire any evil tendencies or walk that path.

Seo Dawon said, not caring to hide his disdain, “However, no evil-attribute User would care to give Moon Issak an invitation.”

“Um……Why?”

“Moon Issak won’t even rub shoulders with evil-attribute Users. He was relentless to them even in dungeons; he was often seen killing or crippling evil-attribute Users under the pretext of legal authority.”

I know he’s said to hate gangsters and bullies…This was more bombastic than just upturning your nose and wrinkling your forehead at them?

Jung Garam gritted his teeth. “All those holy attribute bastards must have sent a part of their brain to their beloved god…They’re so hypocritical–I can’t even communicate with them at all.” He continued without lowering his voice, “Ha. Before Bae Jaemin did me in, he was the one that I wanted to kill the most…” He muttered mournfully.

The hairs on the back of my neck rose once again.

Considering Jung Garam's role as an assassin and his personality, it's amazing that Moon Issak was still alive…As expected, he's a tough opponent.

"T-then this Moon Issak person…How violent is he? He's a part of the [Korean Dungeon Association]–a police-like organization…Can he act like that?" (Oh bb, police brutality…) I asked Seo Dawon, a bit scared now.

He pondered my question thoughtfully before answering, "Think about it this way: Let's say someone smoked in a non-smoking area. Usually, that person would just pay a fine. Most wouldn't take a knife and stab that person's lung claiming that the smoke rotted it."

"Hnngh….H-he's allowed to do that?"

"The harshest penalty he'd receive was a 7-day suspension. Actually, he'd rarely receive the full 7 days as well."

He explained further that the [Korean Dungeon Association] was not a storied institution with a long history. Due to its youth, there were still many holes in User related laws, and there were little to no regulations for law enforcement for interpreting their role and the law so excessively.

Furthermore, few protested against Moon Issak's methods because he tended to direct his excessive violence against evil-attribute Users…

In addition, most evil-attribute Users tend to be individualistic–their unwillingness to meddle in other's affairs when Moon Issak psychotically targeted them exacerbated the problem.

"I told you that bastard's a real loser?" Jung Garam said. "He's someone that converted within the hub; that bastard serves a god called 'Atania.'"

Most Users think of Hubs and Dungeons as high-risk virtual reality games…When I heard that Moon Issak had actually converted according to the hub's lore, I felt dizzy–my mind went blank.

Is he one of those…overly immersed otakus? [1]

“What he’s searching for at the black market is a [religious idol of Atania].” Jung Garam said to my shocked, uncomprehending body.

“What’s that?”

“I guess it’s a holy relic within their religion? I’ve never seen it before either.”

“It’s not sold in the Black Market?”

“Only devotees with appropriate holy power would be able to know if it’s real or fake, after all.”

The plan to invite Moon Issak to dinner using the Black Market ticket was as follows:

Using the hospital staff, we made a reservation at the [Tea Banquet]. The reservation was set for three with Kim Sangyoon, Moon Issak, and Bae Jaemin in mind. I sent someone else to deliver a message to Moon Issak, telling him that he would receive a ticket to the [Black Market] if he were to attend the dinner appointment.

“Kim Sangyoon holds an important role here…Bae Jaemin must think that Kim Sangyoon is part of Moon Issak’s team, and Moon Issak must think that Kim Sangyoon is part of Bae Jaemin’s team. He must not be caught red-handed as a third party.”

Jung Garam’s role was to assist that most delicate balance. Additionally, he served as extra eyes to watch the Warrior for any unexpected actions.

They needed to buy time by dragging out the conversation for as long as possible–allowing Seo Dawon and I to find Koo Hui-seo.

TL: I bet MC’s cheeks are pretty squishy~

Footnotes

1. I think most know what this word means, but an otaku is a young person who is obsessed with a particular aspect of popular culture to the detriment of their social skills. This novel has a lot of popular japanese terms in text >.<

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Chapter 78

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“But, can Kim Sangyoon truly pull this off…?”

Given his past behavior, he had never looked strong in unexpected situations. His face often turned red as well…

Additionally, if what they said about Moon Issak is true, he may suddenly begin to pressure Kim Sangyoon during the conversation. The same goes for Bae Jaemin.

Would Kim Sangyoon be able to endure all that? Since he doesn’t quite know all the information about our party, he thinks he’s the only one dealing with those two…

But, even after voicing my worries, the two ghosts didn’t seem to share the same concern.

“Who knows.”

“Come on, what else are you complaining about now? If he can’t succeed now, then we’ll just have to make him able to succeed.”

It was a bit ridiculous to see Seo Dawon irresponsibly shrug or Jung Garam look so calm while snapping his fingers.

Just how are they planning to deal with Moon Issak?!

“Don’t worry. All Kim Sangyoon needs to do is to make Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak face each other. He doesn’t have to deal with either enemy individually.” Seo Dawon kindly added, seeing my expression laden with anxiety. However, in my perspective, his explanation only continued to muddle my understanding of the situation.

Jung Garam jumped in with a frustrated voice, “When they see each other, do you think they’ll care about Kim Sangyoon? They’ll be too busy attacking each other.”

“Is that so….?”

“Bae Jaemin’s the type of guy to constantly push at someone, provoking them in subtle ways, if they’ve blocked him from doing something he wants. The fact that Moon Issak hadn’t given him his blessings means that something’s soured in that relationship.” [1]

Thinking about it, every time we met, Bae Jaemin refused to let me go until all my energy was spent. I nodded, nervously.

“Honestly, how could you package Kim Sangyoon’s appearance as anything but suspicious? They’re both incredibly vigilant–they wouldn’t easily believe anyone, let alone Kim Sangyoon.” Jung Garam said.

“Then…..”

“So that’s why Kim Sangyoon is all the more perfect for dealing with those two.”

…What on earth does that mean?

I blinked, unable to understand the hidden implications.

Jung Garam continued before I had the chance to ask him to explain further, as if he expected the confusion. “They’ll both underestimate him; if you scare him just a little bit, fear instantly shows up on his face. Further, Bae Jaemin already knows Kim Sangyoon, so he won’t think of him as more than a minion.”

“Mmmm…..”

“That’s why neither of them will care about a sloppy guy like Kim Sangyoon.”

“I-is that so?”

“Honestly, there’s nothing for him to do there. All he has to do is to sit, eat well, observe the chatter, and come back. Don’t worry about him.”

I breathed a sigh of relief after Jung Garam finished his explanation.

Come to think of it, though, I’m in worse shape than Kim Sangyoon…If the role requires someone sloppy, wouldn’t it be better for me to fulfill that part? “…Then, wouldn’t it be better for me to go?”

This time, instead of Jung Garam, Seo Dawon answered with a smile, “Nothing is known about you.”

“Me?”

“Yeah. You’re an unknown factor. Bae Jaemin was fooled by you for that reason. Moon Issak, on the other hand, may have a higher guard due to the lack of information about you. Kim Sangyoon is qualified for this job in various ways.”

His words seemed plausible, so my anxiety was slightly suppressed.

However, disrupting my peace of mind, Seo Dawon said something quite provocative. “In any case, you can’t afford to spare Kim Sangyoon your concern right now.”

“Hoh….? Why?”

“Aren’t you worried about meeting Koo Hui-seo?”

Thinking Seo Dawon’s just trying to scare me, I pointed at him, “You’re coming with me, though?”

“Nn…..” At my declaration, the faces of the two servants staring at me became weird. I meant nothing more than what I stated–that Seo Dawon would be at my side…

Jung Garam frowned as he rubbed the goosebumps that dotted his crossed arms; Seo Dawon, after a short silence, hid his widening smile behind a hand.

Have I…said something strange?

“I guess Lee-kyung-ie’s not scared at all if I’m there.” Seo Dawon began to spout nonsense–embarrassment rose from within me. When did I ever say it like that? I just thought that things would somehow work out…That’s it!

“Don’t exaggerate,” I said.

“So, if Dawon-hyung’s there, you’re not afraid of anything?”

“When did I ever say it like that?!”

“It seems like you’ll declare in the future that you’ll need no one except for hyung?”

“That’s not it!!”

Jung Garam looked away petulantly and muttered under his breath. “When you were with Bae Jaemin you acted as if I was your only lifeline…”

What on earth are they even saying?!

I was rendered speechless by the absurdity that Jung Garam spouted.

“Ah, mm…” However, unlike the disregard I showed for the nonsense, Seo Dawon seemed to take his words seriously. “Lee-kyung-ie does tend to confuse people…”

“What are you even saying!”

“How frustrating, Choi Lee-kyung,” Jung Garam said.

In the end, I threw the pillows on the bed at them.

Of course, they could avoid the pillows with a swift tilt to their heads. Then, as if to tease me for being unable to graze their heads with my attack, Seo Dawon sat across from Jung Garam–sitting leisurely on a sofa–and patted his thigh. “Lee-kyung-ie should also sit down.”

His gesture urged me to sit on his thigh.

…If it were anybody else, would they have sat on him in this kind of situation?”

“Get lost” I immediately cursed.

“That’s overboard…” Seo Dawon complained in an exaggerated tone. Jung Garam exploded into laughter.

How annoying. I’m the master, and they’re the servants. Why are they acting as if I’m cute? [2]

Faced with my rejection, the corners of Seo Dawon’s lips quirked upwards. “Seeing how they’ve hidden Koo Hui-seo’s room, it’s a given that he can’t leave on his own.” He leaned back on the sofa and returned to the topic at hand, without giving a chance for my temper to flare further.

I paused for a moment; for now, the current plan was more important. I sighed deeply, picked up the pillow, and sat on the bed, looking straight at Seo Dawon.

–Ping.

Jung Garam summoned a map between the three of us and enlarged it. The flattened map began to rise, reconstructing into a 3D model of our

annex.

He clearly marked the map with red dots. “There’s an entrance halfway to the elevator.”

On the way to the fourth floor from the third, there was a narrow passage, accessible by bending at the waist and crawling through. After a while, the passageway would lead into a small space–which, on the map, contained flashing yellow indicators.

“There’s a few crude traps but nothing too difficult.” Seo Dawon gently pointed at the blinking yellow marks, identifying them as traps. He pressed the room at the end of the passageway.

The room that probably housed Koo Hui-seo was blackened, unlike the other part of the map.

Seo Dawon said, “This is the issue. We can’t reveal what’s there even with Garam-ie’s skill.”

“Maybe the barrier from Koo Hui-seo’s curse is too strong. There’s no way to find out what’s there besides going there yourselves.” Jung Garam added.

I looked at the small room–a bad feeling weighing at me–and asked, “Are there any other security measures here?”

Ominous or not–even if that room contained a rare dragon–we had to meet Koo Hui-seo. Noticing my resolve, Jung Garam showed me the blue dots moving throughout the building. “The blue dots are the guards. There’s a monitor room on the first floor that will respond to any problems with the traps. I think there’s always two or more people in the monitor room.”

A few simple traps and an obscured room that may contain Koo Hui-seo. On top of that, if we carelessly detonate the traps, the hospital system would send guards…it felt a bit like breaking into a safe.

In the midst of all that, in what state will we find Koo Hui-seo?

“I’ll move first and deal with the traps. When we ride the elevator, we’ll use Lackey.”

Lackey will disguise itself as its owner, once again, to fabricate an alibi. We will make it seem like I went to the fourth floor by accident before going back down to my room on the third floor to hide mine and Seo Dawon’s movements.

There seemed to be no other way, so I nodded yes. Lackey stared at us when it heard its name; after snapping its teeth a few times it returned its attention to the rug once more, tearing at it.

TL: Not @ the two servants for calling Lee-kyung a flirt, lmao.

Thanks lililia for the kofi! Bonus chapter for you~
I finally got through the kofi backlog 😀 I’ll take it a bit slower for a week to let the stockpile build up again~

Footnotes

1. is a word used in the mokpo dialect. The nuance is something ‘bad’ or ‘hurt’. Aka, in this case, ‘hurt relationship’.
2. The word used here, , is more than just “act cute.” It’s more like the cute one would use with children or cute animals.

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Chapter 79

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[Polymorph]

[Stealth]

After the plan was finalized and I summoned Seo Dawon, the Mage used his [Polymorph] spell on Lackey. After Lackey's face changed into mine, Dawon used a series of [Stealth] skills to make me invisible to others.

Once again, my mouth gaped as I saw Lackey polymorph into my image–the skin rippling across its bones. However, with the spell in mind, I no longer thought I was having an out-of-body experience.

When the [Stealth] skill was invoked, I felt a crawling feeling work its way from the top of my crown to my feet, but I could still clearly see my own body. 'Has it been properly activated?' I wondered.

"Look in the mirror."

While I was busy searching and observing myself, Seo Dawon led me in front of a large wall mirror.

And, only Seo Dawon could be seen in the reflection.

What an uncanny feeling…

As we stood in front of the mirror, Seo Dawon cautioned me about certain aspects of the [Stealth] skill. “It’s not like this stops you from being heard, so be careful not to make a sound.”

“…….”

“It’s fine to answer me here?”

“Ah, yeah….”

“Also, it won’t hide physical contact. We have to stay as far away as possible from approaching people.”

“Yes…”

“You don’t use fragrances, right? Perfume or anything?”

“None…..”

When I answered obediently, Seo Dawon slyly smiled as if he were satisfied. Looking now at Lackey (wearing my face), his smile turned toothy as he started some useless quarrel. “Hey, Counterfeit Lee-kyung, if you’re feeling upset, then you should have become a wizard.” [1]

[Clack Clack Clack!]

Didn’t he, when deciding on Lackey’s evolution path, say that he alone was sufficient as a wizard and pushed it to become a soldier? Lackey must have also felt his provocations were ridiculous–in the end, unable to stand his mockery, it rushed in and chomped Seo Dawon’s hand.

Perhaps because it had currently assumed my form, the sound of Lackey’s bite did not seem as violent as before; the sound of bones shattering was not present and sounded more like a weak human bite. Um… should I say that everything was muffled by the filter of saliva? Anyway, the bite sounded quite dull, and Seo Dawon did not seem hurt.

The problem was that the skeleton committed these weird acts while wearing my face…

“Lackey, don’t bite! Hyung’s going to scold you!” I shouted.

[Clack Clack….]

Eventually, I stepped forward and tore him off of the Mage.

“When are you going to scold him?” Seo Dawon asked.

“You shut up.” After sniping at Seo Dawon who was still giggling, I dragged the dazed Lackey into my arms. I couldn’t bring myself to kiss my own face, but Lackey still rubbed its head on my arms. Perhaps that was enough affection–after a while, it lowered itself from my embrace.

It seemed to be conscious of Seo Dawon, wanting to look dignified in front of the other servant. After looking between us, Lackey shook my collar as if it were urging me to start leaving.

“Are we going now?” Jung Garam, waiting at the side, stretched and yawned.

I nodded at him; Lackey, going ahead of me, opened the door. At the same time, Seo Dawon seemed to have disappeared. What’s this? Is he hiding himself from Kim Sangyoon?

“I think we’ll have to hurry now…” When the door opened, Kim Sangyoon appeared, forehead sweaty with anxiety.

His clothes were neat and stiff–without any crumples–as if he had not sat even once while the rest of us were applying skills. Kim Sangyoon approached Lackey carefully, “We only have 5 minutes left…W-will it really be okay for me to be alone?”

Since he couldn’t see me, he seemed to have mistaken the polymorphed Lackey for his master.

Nothing was particularly bad about that…but the problem occurred when Kim Sangyoon rapidly approached the polymorphed skeleton. Perhaps Lackey found something unsavory about the man, it suddenly bit the Warrior’s finger with its fearsome mouth.

[Clack!]

“AH, ARGH!!” Kim Sangyoon, flustered by the sudden attack, pushed Lackey, disguised as me, away; the skeleton stared vacantly back at him.

I tried to blow wind at Lackey, signaling that it shouldn’t behave that way…After a moment of calm, Lackey rose as quick as lightning and dug itself into Kim Sangyoon’s reddening arms. It had the determination to give as good as it got.

“I–I’m….I’m sorry!!” Kim Sangyoon no longer shoved Lackey (in my form) as hard as he could, and instead tried to gently push me off with his palm. However, the weight difference was far too much and the Warrior was pushed back…

However, Lackey’s main method of attack was biting; this soon proved to be a problem. Now used to its changed form, it grabbed at Sangyoon’s outstretched palm and shoved it into its mouth, chewing on it as if the skeleton was trying to bite it off…

However, the attack’s main purpose did not seem to be pain. And the sound of the bite did not have its usual snap and sounded more squishy…

“It seems that not much damage has occurred, considering your lacking muscular strength.” Jung Garam said, voice bland as if he were watching someone else’s house burn down. [2]

What’s even more bewildering was Kim Sangyoon’s response. With a saccharine voice, he asked, “D-did you want to suck….”

Spouting some nonsense, he couldn’t even properly jostle Lackey away.

Am I crazy enough to want to suck your finger?! Return to your senses!

‘Hey! Hurry up and stop it!!’ I mouthed to Jung Garam.

“What if I get bitten too?”

I held onto Jung Garam, begging him to deal with this horrible sight, but the servant simply stood on the sidelines and watched with an amused face. There was one other person who could solve my ordeal, but he had suddenly disappeared…

Eventually I became frustrated; I took a step closer to the tangled Warrior and skeleton, determined to break precautions and negate the effects of the [Stealth] skill…

"Hm, what's going on here?" Before I could say something, a white hand appeared from midair and roughly grabbed Lackey's nape, dragging him away and separating the two. Starting with the hand, Seo Dawon's body began to materialize, as if brushed into existence with ink and pen.

"S-Seo Dawon-nim!"

[Clackclackclackclackclackclackclack!]

Kim Sangyoon's screams and Lackey's shrieks, its response to its most detested enemy, echoed throughout the room. However, Seo Dawon's attitude remained unchanged.

Seo Dawon flung Lackey onto the fluffy sofa and, without looking back, flicked his finger. Like a spring, Lackey bounced after hitting the cushions and froze midair. Its frozen face could only blink uselessly–it seems that Seo Dawon used some skill to restrict its movements.

Then, the Mage stared down at Kim Sangyoon, who sat down with his hands glistening from saliva.

Though I couldn't see Seo Dawon's expression from my perspective, I could see Kim Sangyoon's face. Judging from his pale expression, Seo Dawon must not have looked happy.

"T-this isn't my fault! L-lee-kyung-nim suddenly… That is… He b-bit…" Kim Sangyoon laid down flat on the floor, begging for forgiveness.

But what's truly ridiculous is…At this point, Seo Dawon could have released the [Polymorph] or informed Kim Sangyoon about the situation. He did not say anything that would make the red-haired man more comfortable in this situation–things like 'I understand,' or 'It's fine.'

"Lee-kyung-ie suddenly rushed in and started to suck on your hand?" Rather, he began to pressure the Warrior, lowering his voice and painting a vivid image.

Did he get hooked on bullying Kim Sangyoon? [3]

"I-it's not exactly sucking… It… was more like biting…"

[Choi Lee-kyung: Pester him–]

[Choi Lee-kyung: Fuck, how am I supposed to clear this up]

[Choi Lee-kyung: I have to somehow fix this mess]

I hurriedly sent a message to Seo Dawon. If he wasn't going to clear up this misunderstanding, then he should finish whatever he wanted to do quickly. This incident needed to remain as a black stain in my past.

Seo Dawon seemed to have seen my frantic messages; his shoulders trembled from silent laughter. With the tip of his shoe, Seo Dawon stepped onto the prone Kim Sangyoon's hand (the very hand that was still glistening from Lackey's bite and saliva). "Cut it off."

"…..What?"

"Just kidding. Why are you like this? You need to quickly go to Moon Issak."

As soon as Seo Dawon removed his feet from atop Kim Sangyoon's hand, the Warrior sprang up and ran at a tremendous speed out of the room.

Rather than rushing to meet Moon Issak, he looked as if he were rushing to escape from Seo Dawon.

TL: …There was no way for me to TL this that didn't make it sound dirty… so have this chapter with all of its innuendos…

RIP Kim Sangyoon.

Footnotes

1. = Counterfeit Kyung aka Fake Lee-kyung. Seo Dawon is using a portmanteau of both words to be casual, but there's no easy way to get that across.
2. Idiomatic~ I'm sure you guys can guess but essentially it means to passively watch someone else's misfortune.
3. This would be literally translated as "has gotten the taste for bullying Kim Sangyoon"

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Chapter 80

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Of course, Kim Sangyoon could no longer run away when he reached the elevator door, and he simply waited for us, drenched in cold sweat. Even after Seo Dawon had hidden himself once again, the Warrior decidedly looked away from Lackey–the other must have made some brutal threat.

“…….”

I felt sorry for him who was attacked by both Lackey and Seo Dawon despite knowing nothing. However, I stayed silent, for there was nothing I could do straight away.

I kept a firm hold on Lackey from behind, so, thankfully, the skeleton kept calm. The entire party loaded into the soon jam-packed elevator, heads down, and an awkward silence reigned.

–Ding.

“….I’ll be back.”

When the elevator arrived on the first floor, Kim Sangyoon whispered as he bowed his head towards Lackey.

Kim Sangyoon and Lackey walked together to the restaurant in order to create an alibi by briefly showing my face to those that were monitoring the building–that ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ had parted ways in front of the restaurant

and returned immediately to the elevator. My eyes tracked the Warrior and Jung Garam's entrance into [Tea Banquet] before the elevator doors closed.

'You can press the button for the 4th floor.' I whispered quietly to Lackey, ordering him to do as I said. When the elevator began climbing upwards, I sent a chat message to Seo Dawon.

[**Choi Lee-kyung**: I pressed on the 4th floor]

"I know. I'm here too?"

Ah! Oh my god!

I scampered to the side quickly, startled by the whispering voice in my ears. Lackey seemed to also be surprised by Seo Dawon's sudden appearance; it opened its mouth to hiss, not unlike a shocked cat.

Though, I was thankful that Seo Dawon grabbed and pulled on my arm to stop me from falling over while surprised.

"Your ears are quite sensitive?" He said.

Thankful or not, my forehead wrinkled at those sexual harassment-like comments. "Are you a pervert?"

"Are you interested in that?"

…I don't want to speak with him anymore…

When I shut up, exhaustion lining my face, Seo Dawon smiled and whispered something inaudible while touching the elevator wall. Something had changed, perhaps, as the elevator doors did not open despite it reaching its destination on the 4th floor.

“Press the button for the 3rd floor, Lackey.” Seo Dawon had briefly taken his hand off the wall when the elevator had stalled, but, after Lackey pressed the button, he placed his hands back in their original position again.

At that moment, my eyes filled with painful light, as if molten gold poured into the elevator. When we arrived at the third floor again, after a customary –Ding!, the bright afterimage had disappeared.

Lackey got off on this floor. I had already explained to the skeleton in advance, but I was nervous until I saw it return to our room without glancing back at me. A sigh of relief escaped; the alibi-creation operation was a success.

“Haah…” I sighed.

“Then, shall we go?” After the door closed, Seo Dawon asked, looking at me. After my nod, he pressed the button to manually open the doors.

‘Huh…..?’

A totally different space unfolded before us.

“….!”

Just before, the view beyond the elevator was most definitely the third-floor hallway right in front of our room, but, when the elevator door reopened, a dismally gray concrete space completely different from the flashy hallway was revealed.

The light that dimly shone upon the dark hallway was due to Seo Dawon’s [Light] spell that floated above my shoulder. There was no lighting on the space’s wall or ceiling.

‘Isn’t this totally like a Dungeon?’

Somehow, I found it hard to take a step forward; the dilapidated space reminded me greatly of the <Tower of Command>. However, Seo Dawon, who got off first, gently held my hand. He must have noticed my fear and apprehension.

Eventually, holding the Mage's hand, I stepped into the gloomy hallway; after I left, the elevator continued its slow journey down. Goosebumps raised all over my skin as I looked at the empty, hollow space.

"Cold?" Seo Dawon asked when he saw me shivering.

"N-no…" I shook my head.

Involuntarily, I gripped tighter onto his hand. Fortunately, instead of teasing me, Seo Dawon fixed my grip and ignited another [Light] next to my shoulder.

* * *

We walked slowly down the hall.

On the way, signs saying [restricted area] often littered the path. Seo Dawon brandished his gold-tinged hands whenever he saw such signs; the signs would shrivel and turn black until we passed–at which point it would spring back anew.

Those have got to be the traps that Jung Garam warned us about… Do parties usually leave traps activated like that? I asked Seo Dawon my question.

"Those types of traps alert you after they are destroyed or broken–they function as a warning–so that's why I left them." Seo Dawon patiently answered.

Perhaps there were more hidden traps alongside the obvious installations, as Seo Dawon kept busy, brandishing his hands at certain intervals.

However, the problem was……

At some point, a strange smell began to waft through. At first, it smelt sweet, like caramelizing sugar, but, as we got closer to our destination, the sweetness became more intense. By the time we were steps away from our goal, our heads were pounding from the saccharine smell.

“What on earth could this scent be?”

“It seems that Koo Hui-seo isn’t locked up in some normal way.”

It felt as if I was the only one suffering; Seo Dawon walked calmly forward as if he couldn’t smell anything. When he finally arrived in front of a closed room, he placed his palms carefully on the door.

–Sssssst

When he touched the door, a crumbling sound–like the falling of long-accumulated dust–emerged, and an odd wave passed through the door, like ripples over a calm lake. The cause of this phenomenon, Seo Dawon, soon took his hand off.

The door was old and rusty; it looked more like the iron door used in warehouses than in personal bedrooms. It was locked by a long steel bar hanging horizontally on a latch with a large lock hanging from the frame.

Ever since Seo Dawon touched the door–and the surface began to ripple like a lake–the lock made a rattling noise and released itself with a clang. After the large lock fell to the floor, the steel bar was also automatically pushed out of the latch and removed.

‘Urgh…..’

Unfortunately, the offensive smell further intensified after the door unlocked. I concentrated on the door that slowly began to open while barely holding back my nausea.

Just then, a faint voice could be heard.

[I’ve been afraid for so long…]

But, as soon as the [Light] spell shined upon the room’s insides, I looked forward and completely forgot about the voice; my mouth gaped wide open. There was something so shocking in front of me that my lips stiffened and I couldn’t move one inch.

“Sure enough…I thought the direction of the traps was a bit strange.”

Unlike my frozen self, Seo Dawon only muttered something unintelligible under his breath and moved into the room without delay. His steps disturbed the accumulated dust, and white clouds dissipated into the air.

I entered the room half-heartedly, dragged along by our connected hands. I didn’t want to look at **it** in front of me, but I couldn’t force myself to tear my eyes away. In addition, we were approaching closer to **it**.

My short panic ended when Seo Dawon unhesitatingly reached over to touch **it**. I unconsciously grabbed that hand.

“Hm?” Seo Dawon, interrupting while trying to touch **it**, looked back at me. Only genuine curiosity remained in his expression–his eyes showed no anxiety or fear.

I was fed up with the look on his face. No matter how dead he may be, how could he be so calm about this?

“W-what are you doing!”

“Why?”

“Just now, you…you were going to touch it? Why?”

“Hm? I need to see the face to figure out whether or not it’s Koo Hui-seo.”

I was speechless at his tranquility.

At first glance, there was nothing wrong with what he said. As he said, that *thing's* face was covered by long, scruffy hair.

But that *thing*.*

'No matter how you see it…It's obviously a corpse?'

The body was rotting, hanging upside down in the middle of the room. In addition, the body was not the only thing of note in the room; a huge tree that had halfway encompassed the body stood in the middle of the room as if supporting the structure.

Just why would a gruesome sight fit for a Dungeon exist in a VIP ward?!

Furthermore, the black fruit abundantly hanging from the tree seemed to be the cause of the rotting stench that intensified as we proceeded through the hallway.

It wafted from the decomposing fruits fallen at the base of the tree. I was sure they were also the cause of the soles of our shoes sticking to the floor. In that situation, Seo Dawon stretched out to its hair, as if to uncover its face…

But, do you really have to touch that with your own hands? Damn it… Doesn't this guy know the core tenets of horror movies? Touching something so suspicious and disgusting would definitely raise a flag! [1]

"W-why would you….touch it." I grabbed Seo Dawon's hand, beseeching him, and dragged him as much as I could to my side. Since you're a Mage, don't use your body–use your skills from afar!

"Lee-kyung-ah, are you scared?" Seo Dawon asked without hiding his mocking lilt. Before I could deny him, he grabbed the head of the corpse consumed by the tree and lifted it straight up, forcing its gaze onto me.

“You’ve really suffered a lot by being a Necromancer” [2] Seo Dawon said with a grin, but my mind went blank after making eye contact with *_it_*.

Because, long before *_its_* head was raised…*_it_* began to smile, mouth wide open.

[I knew you would come to find me.]

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: And so we move into more serious matters~ (but not without some flirting first). Enter Koo Hui-seo!

Footnotes

1. Raising a flag means to create the possibility for an event later on in a game/piece of media. In this case, touching a haunted doll would lead to the doll haunting you!
2. He’s basically calling him peculiar but determined because Necromancers shouldn’t be scared of corpses. is a weird word. It’s like, you’ve achieved something through suffering

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Chapter 81

Chapter 81

"……" I felt a bit like fainting right then and there.

However, I felt like I was the only one who took a blow from the corpse-like man's smiling face; Seo Dawon calmly scanned his face and said, "It's Koo Hui-seo, alright. But, how is he still alive in this state?"

[I'm in this mess because I've stayed alive.]

And, bizarrely, this 'Koo Hui-seo' responded in a cheerful tone. I observed Koo Hui-seo's face and body once more while listening to their conversation.

I wasn't sure what was happening to the parts of his body consumed by the tree…but the parts of Koo Hui-seo exposed outside were molding blue. No matter where I looked, he was definitely a corpse.

Even the face revealed beneath his hair, which Seo Dawon still held onto, showcased decomposed, foggy wide-open eyes. He looked exactly like some zombie out of a movie–it was hard to believe that he was still alive.

"U-undead…?" I said, unthinking… The two men in front of me began to speak simultaneously.

"He's not an undead."

['I' haven't quite died yet.]

…Then, what on earth are you?

When I stared at the two with a dazed expression, Seo Dawon looked down and lobbed a question at Koo Hui-seo instead of answering me. “Is this your mother’s handicraft?”

[I guess you can say that, just by looking at the result.] Koo Hui-seo gave a vague answer before letting out a deep sigh. The tree trembled and a few hanging black fruits fell with his breath.

A black fruit rolled down my shoulder which was placed near a hanging branch. I casually grabbed it with my hands but frowned when it immediately burst at the slight pressure. The fruit was rotten even though it was ripening on the tree until now.

Perhaps he saw me, Koo Hui-seo talked to me in a very kind tone.

[Would you like to taste one?]

…Though the contents were anything but kind.

“N-not really.” I jumped to retreat a few steps just in case he would recommend once more.

In that period, Seo Dawon carelessly let go of Koo Hui-seo’s head; he slowly walked around the trunk of the thick tree and approached me. “He’s not an undead; he’s a chimera.”

“Huh?”

“This thing. You were wondering what ‘it’ was.”

Of course, I was curious about Koo Hui-seo’s situation. Honestly, wouldn’t everyone, if they came upon this scene, exclaim, “How did you end up like this?”

This guy…I’m not wondering whether or not Koo Hui-seo’s a [Chimera]. I’m wondering how a normal human being was chimerized within the span of a few years!

However Seo Dawon, after answering “chimera,” seemed to think his job was done; he simply crossed his arms and glowered at the tree. He looked lost in thought…I felt that it wasn’t the right time to ask further questions like ‘What exactly is a [Chimera],’ or ‘What did you mean when you mentioned his mother?’

“……” Eventually, though I loathed the idea of getting closer, I took a few careful steps and stood in front of Koo Hui-seo’s face. I glanced at Seo Dawon but seeing as he made no moves to restrain me, I must not have been in great danger.

I drew courage from his calm attitude. I squatted from my position without grabbing onto Koo Hui-seo’s hair; from there, I looked at where I thought his eyes may be.

I could see his upturned eyes between the strands of his hair, but I wasn’t all that scared–the thin hair barrier emboldened me, and the initial shock had disappeared.

So, though I trembled slightly, I gathered the courage to ask Koo Hui-seo a question. “Excuse me…… How did you end up like this?”

[You mean, how I look right now?] Koo Hui-seo replied softly.

“Yes…”

[…Mmm, Where should I start.] Koo Hui-seo said, shaking his head here and there while contemplating his answer. [Hui-seo was such a kind boy.]

“….?” Why was he speaking in the third person? Isn’t he Koo Hui-seo? Why would you call out your name in a story about yourself?

[To give you an example of his kindness, he took care of the son his father had out of wedlock as if he were his full-blooded brother. Later, he personally added that brother to the family register.]

I couldn’t interrupt to inquire about his weird way of speaking–it seemed as if the ensuing story was not easy to tell.

Koo Hui-seo's brother…isn't that Koo Kyungman? To think he was an illegitimate child.

[However, that decision became like poison to Koo Hui-seo. 'Father' didn't care for Hui-seo's personality. When he was young, he was tortured for hours trying to fix that personality…]

"T-that's…"

[But, Koo Kyungman took after his father. Additionally, 'father' loved Koo Kyungman's mother more than 'mother.' I guess you could say this was a tragedy that everyone could predict.]

So, to recap, Koo Hui-seo's biological mother was the official wife, but the father loved the son that resulted from his affair more? Is that the gist of the matter? However, it was Koo Hui-seo who legally added Koo Kyungman to the household…

Everything up to this point was easy to understand–a cliche soap opera.

I was more preoccupied with Koo Hui-seo's strange attitude. It was rather strange to speak about your family history in a detached manner.

The corpse-like man gently continued. [I wish Hui-seo listened to me then…I told him to kill his brother or inflict total-body-paralysis on him. However, Hui-seo wouldn't listen.]

That, right there, was really weird.

He's Koo Hui-seo, right? Why is he speaking as if he's someone else?

Perplexed, I was cut through his story with a question. "E-excuse me… But… Aren't you Koo Hui-seo?"

[Hm? Well, we're a bit mixed together…I guess, technically, a part of me is Koo Hui-seo…]

What on earth is he talking about?

Fortunately, he seemed to quickly notice my utter confusion.

[Hmm…] Koo Hui-seo said, before quickly rushing into a short explanation. [I am Koo-Hui-seo's dregs–what remains of him. Hui-seo's sorrow, his loneliness, his pain…all of that was given to me. I grew by feeding on those things…]

…What did I just hear?

Koo Hui-seo's explanation was still disconcerting me, but Seo Dawon, from behind, lightly pressed on my shoulders and whispered into my ear, "He's talking about multiple personalities."

"What?"

Multiple personalities?

[Ah, but 'I'm' the only one left. The other personalities couldn't withstand our 'current state.' Unfortunately, Koo Hui-seo couldn't endure either.]

I could do nothing but blink–it felt as if too much information was revealed, overloading my brain.

However, Koo Hui-seo was not yet finished.

[As Hui-seo gradually broke down, a couple of the more violent personalities fought for dominance several times. Except for Hui-seo, most of us wanted to murder his brother…After returning to his senses, Hui-seo would begin to self-harm. It was a vicious cycle.]

"So that's why you handed over [Red Dragon] to your brother and left?" Unlike my dazed self, Seo Dawon quickly pinpointed and asked some keen questions.

[It was neatly packaged that he had willingly left to outsiders… But, in reality, he was kicked out.] Koo Hui-seo answered. [After all, I've stabbed him several times.]

At this point, my breaths became agitated, but Seo Dawon pressed on. “Your mother wasn’t involved?”

[In the beginning, she devised many ways to pause or slow down the degradation, but Hui-seo and ‘Mother’ quarreled a lot after adding Kyungman to the family register. Since then, she hasn’t been involved with us much.]

After hearing those words, Seo Dawon stroked his chin and was silent for a moment. Then, he asked in a tone that more suited a casual and friendly conversation, “We already know that Koo Hui-seo was under threat from countless assassination attempts after leaving [Red Dragon]. Consequently, I heard your mother protected you with a curse.”

Koo Hui-seo giggled as if he had heard a particularly funny story. Seo Dawon said nothing as the other continued to laugh; a heavy bleakness settled in the air.

[Well, I guess ‘mother’ saved our lives…Though I look like this now, I am indeed alive. Would you like me to thank her for that?]

Koo Hui-seo laughed again, and the huge tree began to shake with the sound of his laughter. Black fruits poured down from above like raindrops.

TL: Anyone wanna try one of those fruits?

I posted this chap early since I was pretty awake~ But I’m still taking my time in uploading this week especially since I’ve been TL’ing slower~

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Chapter 82

Chapter 82

As soon as Koo Hui-seo finished speaking, a dismal feeling settled in the atmosphere between us. Simultaneously, a more pungent scent erupted from the conjoined tree and man alongside the stench of the black fruits.

That smell…The more I smelled it, strangely, the more I felt like I was being suffocated; I had no desire to get any closer; some instinctive wariness emerged from within.

However, unlike me, Seo Dawon stepped forward. He grabbed the man's half-exposed forearm and swept his hands across it, as if he were surveying furniture. A faint light appeared when Seo Dawon's hand passed over Koo Hui-seo's arm; before I could take a close look, that light sunk into him.

I was nervous, wondering what skill Seo Dawon had used on Koo Hui-seo or what changes would appear in the chimerized man, but the two did not talk or react even after the gleam of the light had faded.

"You received this curse from Koo Hui-seo's mother?" Seo Dawon finally broke the long-lasting silence. As expected, the light seemed to be some diagnostic tool.

[…Mother seemed to think it was a 'cure.'] Koo Huiseo answered the Mage's question obediently. However, his mild tone could not hide the hatred that accompanied the word, 'cure.' [It would have been better if I had gone to a psychiatrist. She believed that she could solve things on her own.]

"What happened?"

[At first, mother considered Hui-seo's mental schism a small misfortune. That's why she treated it as a 'Witch'–it started with a 'Baptism.']

'…Is he speaking about *_that_* Baptism?'

I've heard of a skill called the [Witch's Baptism].

High-level Witches often received large sums of money in return for casting the [Witch's Baptism] buff on Users; the buff was known to chase away misfortune or calamities that would persistently cling to the victim.

Therefore, the effectiveness and results prescribed by each testimony of the baptized Users were quite different. Some purport immediate relief from chronic headaches, and others swear they've returned alive from an accident that had almost killed them.

'How was a skill that drives away misfortune supposed to treat something like Dissociative Identity Disorder?'

Koo Hui-seo continued, as if he had read my mind.

[Of course, a severe mental illness like a personality disorder could not be alleviated by a baptism. From then on, mother began suspecting Hui-seo and began feeding him truth serums.]

"She suspected him?"

[She suspected that we may have been lying about our illness–that we may have broken the Witch's designated taboo.]

He also explained the taboo.

As the son of a witch, Koo Hui-seo's mother wanted to keep him under her protection. That's why she created a 'taboo' that changed daily; dozens of conditional blessings hung upon that taboo and would be maintained if Hui-seo did not commit the taboo.

A witch's skill set usually consisted of restrictions and rewards–the stricter the restrictions the higher the rewards…and the more severe the

price would be for breaking them.

And at first, Koo Hui-seo would break the taboo several times.

If there were only one or two taboos, he may have been able to maintain that balance, but his mother cared about her son very much. She devised protective skills every day that wouldn't allow even a scrape from a shaving razor.

In the blink of an eye, dozens of restrictions were placed upon him; Koo Hui-seo thought that he couldn't live any longer while conscious of so many taboos. However, Koo Hui-seo's mother neither backed down nor compromised. Her son's rebellion fell on deaf ears.

[Hui-seo lost one thing with each taboo he broke. He may lose his sight for a few days; other times, he might lose his voice.]

"That kind of…" I couldn't help but curse at her style of discipline.

No matter how much you may want to protect him, how could anyone do that to their own child? It's a perfect environment for breeding obsessive disorders… Such mental illnesses could form even in their absence in a sound mind.

According to him, the taboos were strange and tricky as well.

His shirt must always be buttoned to the very last button; he must only check the time five times a day; he must not be alone in a room with a red lamp; don't step on white thresholds; etc… There were dozens of restrictions with no consistent rules; it was far too difficult to memorize. I felt suffocated just imagining myself in Koo Hui-seo's position.

Furthermore, he had to endure more than his mother's obsession with taboos and baptisms.

[Funny thing is, the protections didn't really work through his father.]

"His father?"

[He never liked Hui-seo. We would often get beaten up or verbally abused.]

He was abused by his father.

And, the level of abuse was quite severe: hanging upside down for an hour while being hit by a bat or breaking bones while blocking a golf club.

[Mother's 'protection' never worked against father.]

"Why…?"

[Because father's violence was designated as neither escapable nor preventable. To summarize, Hui-seo had to live without violating rules for a protection that was ultimately useless when he needed it the most. Wasn't this the perfect environment to go insane?] Koo Hui-seo said mockingly. [However, mother believed that Hui-seo wouldn't have developed this disease if he kept to the rules. She believed that he had fallen ill after deceiving her and breaking taboos.]

"……"

[So, Hui-seo often tried to kill himself…That didn't go his way either. When he tried to hang himself, the rope broke; if he fell off the roof, his fall would be stopped in the middle, and he'd only break his leg.]

The baptism was cast by one of the nation's foremost witches in an effort to protect her child. No matter how hard he may have tried to die, he wouldn't have been able to succeed.

'Did Koo Kyung man, perhaps, seek out Seo Dawon to end his brother's pain?' I thought.

He had only asked for Seo Dawon to kill his brother.

Seo Dawon, who happened to be looking at me, silently shook his head, signalling for me to keep mum. He might have thought the same but had decided that it would do no good to mention Koo Kyungman to the corpse-like man. Or maybe Seo Dawon wanted to bring the matter up on his own.

Anyway, I kept my mouth shut at his cue and decided to continue to listen.

“Hmm…I’m sorry to hear that–the fact that you’ve been abused by your family.” Seo Dawon said.

“……” I couldn’t help but feel embarrassed at the drivel that left the Mage’s mouth.

How could he give his condolences with an expression that brokered no feelings of comfort or sympathy…? What was he thinking?

[It seems I’ve bored you?] Of course, Koo Hui-seo would reply in an understandably jilted way in retort–his voice sounded different from the polite tone used earlier.

However, Seo Dawon answered without hesitation, “A little?”

[……]

“Anyone would be able to guess that you’ve suffered through some rough times just by looking at you.” Seo Dawon added sarcastically, “After all, chimeras don’t normally decay while alive.”

This social interaction burned me from the insides. Is he the devil? What if Koo Hui-seo becomes uncooperative because of your words…

[I guess that’s true. I’ve said something useless.]

However, the atmosphere did not turn perilous as I had expected. Koo Hui-seo bowed his head and closed his mouth, as if he agreed with the Mage. He looked as if he no longer wanted to talk. He shrank back into the crack in the tree that housed his face.

Maybe some of his expectations for our visit had vanished. I stared at Seo Dawon, asking through my expression ‘What are you going to do now?’ The Mage, though, stayed calm.

Before Koo Hui-seo could fully bow his head, Seo Dawon asked arrogantly, “I’m curious–If we completely restore your body, would ‘Koo Hui-seo’ come back to life?”

The chimera immediately stopped moving as soon as he heard Seo Dawon’s words.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Sorry if this chapter is rough, I had to PR it in a hurry!

RIP Koo Hui-seo.

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Chapter 83

Chapter 83

[How amusing.]

Koo Hui-seo raised his head again.

Though he was smiling and his words were positive, it felt like his demeanor changed with Seo Dawon's words–like he was poked in some sensitive area.

What bothered me was that, as Koo Hui-seo raised his head, his body and the branches of the melded tree inched close to us with a creaking sound.

"……." Though I didn't think Koo Hui-seo could do much to us in his current state, I stood tall with a casual facade; still, I clenched my sweaty palms. Was this unexpected situation still a part of the Mage's plans?

Seo Dawon, too, was not an easy opponent.

He stomped on the chimera's roots, which had been making suspicious movements near our ankles, and summoned a red sphere on top of his palm.

Judging by the fluttering heat that wafted to my face, he must be using a fire attribute skill. It was a threat: any funny business and the other would lose even his rotting wooden trunk.

His intimidation tactic was quite effective.

Koo Hui-seo's branches, which had been spreading to the ceiling like ivy vines, and his wriggling roots calmed down.

"In the first place, I came here to get information that only Koo Hui-seo would have. Before I heard your story, I thought that Koo Kyungman was imprisoning his brother here." Seo Dawon steadfastly said while looking at the chimera. I nodded softly–that was the truth.

Honestly, who could have imagined that a healthy human being would have been combined with a tree to turn into a chimera?

[Koo Kyungman? Too Hui-seo?] Our opponent grumbled–the nuance of his tone belied the fact that he could not believe those words.

"Koo Kyungman had asked me to assassinate his brother. Of course, I declined though." Seo Dawon continued, steamrolling over Hui-seo's confusion.

When Koo Hui-seo looked at the Mage in disbelief, Seo Dawon simply stood there with arms crossed over his chest–as if he was saying 'It's your choice, believe me or don't.' There wasn't much evidence to support our claims, though, since this had all happened before Seo Dawon died.

However, Koo Hui-seo merely nodded and muttered to himself, as if we had agitated some hidden suspicions.

[Well, now or then, he was always that kind of guy. Even when Hui-seo was alive, he'd always behave like a rat…]

'…Come to think of it, though the original may have extremely adored his brother…when the disorder progressed, all the other personalities that appeared had wanted to kill Koo Kyungman, right?' I wondered about the nature of the brother's true relationship, but the chimera had finished muttering to himself.

[I don't know what you want, but everything that Hui-seo should know, I do as well.] The chimera said, drawing the conversation to its natural end. He

continued, desperation leaking into his voice as he looked at Seo Dawon. [If it's Hui-seo you need, I can suffice.]

Perhaps he knew that the chances of being saved were growing slim. Since we informed him that Koo Kyungman was contracting an assassination, he must have realized that he couldn't expect anything from him.

Seo Dawon also noticed Koo Hui-seo's changing attitude. He looked down at the chimera and said, in a soft voice quite different from before, "All I want is information that could cause Koo Kyungman's downfall in the ranks of the [Red Dragon]."

[……]

"If you give me valuable information, I'll lift the curse." He said, relentlessly.

After hearing our desires, Koo Hui-seo fell silent. Judging from his expression, he didn't seem like he was going to refuse our request and was instead lost in the past.

[I have no such information to disgrace Koo Kyungman; I've been locked up here for long…]

His answer was ultimately frank but disappointing.

"Honestly, if what we're searching for could be gained with just a few words, any old dog or cow could have headed a guild coup…"

What should we do now? At this rate, we'd be leaving empty-handed…

[But, if I return to my original form and persuade Mother, it wouldn't be difficult to disgrace Koo Kyungman.] Koo Hui-seo immediately offered an alternative trade.

Is he trying to say that although he has no information currently, once he returns he can grab the seat from his brother? However, I doubted the

plausibility of his statement–after all, Koo Hui-seo was stuck here after parting with his mother on bad terms.

“Didn’t you say that you and your mother currently have a horrible relationship?” Seo Dawon asked, sharing my view.

[Returning to my normal body will be a sign to her that I’ve become an obedient son who follows his mother’s orders submissively. I bet she’ll forgive me after looking at my face.] Koo Hui-seo responded. [This curse, after all, can only be lifted if I forgo my ego and become Mother’s doll.]

He gave a slight smile–I saw chilly determination upon his face.

Seo Dawon looked towards me after the chimera finished speaking–it seems as if the ultimate decision was left to me. Because of that, Koo Hui-seo also turned to look my way.

‘Why on earth would you leave something this important to me when you’ve been doing fine talking and making demands on your own….?’ However, we’ve already come this far–leaving Koo Hui-seo behind was out of the question. I nodded in agreement.

“Good. Then let’s proceed with the contract.” As soon as Seo Dawon received my permission, manifested a floating red parchment in the air.

The Chimera paused in the middle of reading the terms. He looked towards us and carefully asked [Koo Kyungman…Are you going to kill him?]

“Why? You want to take charge of that?”

[No, that’s not it. I was wondering…if you could hand him over to me for a few years before killing him.]

“Why?”

[…..] Koo Huiseo was briefly silent before bowing his head. [I know this request must be worrying. But, I won’t let him go or defy your orders .]

“That’s….”

[If several years is too difficult, just one year would be fine.]

Though he would not reveal the reason, his voice sounded so desperate…Strangely enough, I couldn’t bring myself to refuse his demand.

Seo Dawon saw my hesitation and sighed. “Haah, fine. In return, I’m adding another condition.”

[I understand.]

At Koo Hui-seo’s nod, a feathered quill pen appeared above the parchment that floated between us.

Under the clause [This contract will expire with Koo Kyungman’s death], an additional term, [Barring unavoidable circumstances, custody of Koo Kyungman will be transferred to Party B after he has been secured], was etched onto the contract.

I wrote my name with my finger at the bottom of the contract; Koo Hui-seo struggled to sign his name, gripping the quill pen with his mouth.

“Well then…Bite onto this.” With the contract finished, Seo Dawon took a glittering stone out of his inventory and stuffed it into Koo Hui-seo’s mouth–the stone looked similar to a blue opal. Roughly biting onto something that must have been quite hard, Koo Hui-seo did as he was asked.

“You’d better close your eyes.” Seo Dawon’s advice sounded more like a threat. He placed his hands back in his inventory after the chimera closed his eyes.

He took out a razor-sharp, blue axe.

“No way…” He isn’t planning to chop down Koo Hui-seo with that… right? I looked at Seo Dawon in surprise, but he forwent any explanation and clapped his hands.

Alongside the clapping noise, the recently summoned axe automatically flew a moderately far distance away from Koo Hui-seo. The head of the axe and its blade faced towards the chimera.

My intuition was terribly on point: with a hefty thud, the axe dug deep into Koo Hui-seo's torso.

[Mmm…..]

Though the chimera groaned, he did not open his eyes as Seo Dawon had recommended. Rather, I was the one that felt sick from the sight–it felt like he was logging a living tree.

"There's not even a blood splatter, what's wrong with you?" Seo Dawon teased.

"Eugh…."

"Should I hug you if you're so scared?"

"I'm most scared of you…"

"So mean." Seo Dawon parted from the chimera and walked over to me, spouting some nonsense. He attempted to place his hands at my waist, but I pushed him away and turned towards Koo Hui-seo instead.

Since the axe had buried itself into what should have been the chimera's waist, goosebumps raised all over me when the Mage touched mine–a morbid parallel.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: What could he want with his brother for 1 year? Also Koo Hui-seo, as a character concept, is quite horrifying. Imagine being a living, rotting tree chimera for years.

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Chapter 84

Chapter 84

The axe was halfway implanted into Koo Hui-seo’s torso, when…

A sound similar to rushing water appeared!

Until a while ago, I could only hear the thuds of logging, but suddenly a different noise joined the cacophony. Black water began to flow down from the place where the axe struck.

Koo Hui-seo lay motionless; similar black water flowed down from his mouth… To be honest, I thought for a moment that Seo Dawon had killed him.

“I-is he okay like this…?

“It’s going well.” Seo Dawon said, telling me to not worry. He took a step back to avoid that black water that had puddled at our feet.

I hurriedly followed him, but, fortunately, the unidentified black liquid stopped pooling. The amount of water that flowed from Koo Hui-seo’s mouth also decreased.

However, as the black liquid filled the small room, a fishy smell– different from the rotting sickly sweet scent–emerged. I asked, grimacing, “What is this smell…This isn’t blood, is it?”

“It’s blood, but it’s not Koo Hui-seo’s.”

“…This is really blood?”

“Curses usually utilize blood.”

When I heard that the liquid coming out was blood used as an offering for the curse, I covered my nose and mouth with my sleeve. ‘No way. It’s not…Human blood, right?’

Of course, I lacked the courage to ask for further details, so I simply stayed silent and waiting for some other change. Fortunately, it wasn’t long before Koo Hui-seo’s eyebrows and glabella began to wriggle.

“[Blegh]…” The recently awakened Koo Hui-seo coughed and spat out what remained in his mouth onto the floor.

I thought it would be the opal-colored stone that Seo Dawon pushed into his mouth before chopping him with the axe, but the stone that popped out was completely different from before. What had landed in the pool of rotten blood looked like a lump of clay.

As soon as the stone touched the puddle, it shattered into various pieces; suspicious green smoke leaked out and disappeared into the air.

“…Is that it?” I asked.

“Yeah. We’re almost done.” Seo Dawon closed his eyes and raised his arms out straight, palms facing down.

Soon, there was a twinkling light that surrounded his arms–that light shone from within Koo Hui-seo’s body. When Seo Dawon opened his eyes, the trunk split open, like cracks widening along a plaster.

Creak–

As Koo Hui-seo’s body continued to crack, hazy white dust arose. And, before long, the tree began to fall in the direction of the axe with a creaking sound.

I stood, staring blankly at that sight, and Seo Dawon drew me to his side, protecting me from the falling tree by standing in front. Afterwards, I immediately heard the great crash of the tree’s total collapse.

A great deal of dust stirred up all at once, turning the room foggy. I stared out from behind Seo Dawon's back, wondering if Koo Hui-seo was fine. I saw a blurry shadow amid the dust cloud…

"W-What?" As soon as I squinted, trying to focus, Seo Dawon covered my eyes with his hands.

"Why are you covering my eyes?" I asked.

"Lee-kyung-ie can't see such gross things."

"Huh?"

What could be left behind that was so gross?

Nervous, I held my breath without attempting to free myself from Seo Dawon's hold. Before long, I could hear the rustling sound of someone approaching us.

"What do you mean, gross…That's too much." I heard a young voice, flush with amusement, from nearby. It was an unfamiliar voice, but I was familiar with the speech pattern.

"Koo…… Hui-seo-ssi?"

"Yes. That's right." His voice was quite weak, like a man who had been suffering from an illness for a long time. But there was nothing otherworldly–as if he wasn't human–as it had been before. Should I say that it was like any ordinary man's voice? Though, I did feel years of experience laden in it…

"Why don't you search your inventory?" Seo Dawon didn't remove the hand that was blindfolding my eyes and, instead, spoke to the other in a cold voice, as if he were displeased with him.

"Ahh…." Koo Hui-seo began making a rustling noise. "I should have some hospital scrubs somewhere…Give me a moment."

Following that, it sounded like he was clothing himself.

Then…Did Seo Dawon cover my eyes because of Koo Hui-seo's nudity?

I looked at Seo Dawon in disbelief, but he looked straight ahead and, a while later, dropped his hand. Only then was I able to properly confirm what Koo Hui-seo looked like as a 'human.'

When I first saw Koo Hui-seo, I thought he was an old man in his twilight years.

His figure was very small, and his hair had white patches here and there. The baggy hospital scrubs didn't fit him at all. Even his silhouette, reflected through the hospital gown, was so thin. I wondered if it was okay for him to stand.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Koo Hui-seo."

"Ah, yes. My name is… Choi Lee-kyung."

However, when he approached me with an outstretched hand, that impression was completely blown away when I looked into his eyes.

Even though he looked quite shabby at first, his eyes contained a sparkle that could not be hidden. That sparkle was a little different from the ordinary joy of a person that had been released after a long imprisonment.

'Rather than that, it's….'

It's more like the euphoria exuded by a prisoner that had clawed his own way to freedom, escaping from his jail? I don't know why I felt such a savage feeling from a man that spoke so gentlemanly and was so skinny– almost on the verge of death…

Even his short handshake gave me goosebumps. In the end, as if shaking him off, I let go of his hands and retreated a few steps.

Koo Hui-seo, giving little notice to my attitude, said with a smile, "Now that the curse has been lifted, my mother will probably come here soon. You two…It would be too troublesome if you met her, yes?"

I was blatantly staring at the man. His words brought me back to my senses, and I looked at Seo Dawon. The mage replied with a nod, “Get yourself settled as soon as possible. Start preparing to brief us on Koo Kyungman starting today.”

“I understand. How should I contact you?”

“I’ll give you Lee-kyung-ie’s phone number.” Koo Hui-seo nodded politely, called up his status window, and wrote down my cell phone number.

After he finished his business, Seo Dawon and I turned towards the door. However, a strange sound that I presumed to be Koo Hui-seo, passed through my ears.

[Please, Don’t be too wary of me.]

“…..?”

What is this?

I turned back towards him; Koo Hui-seo was still looking at us with a temperate smile. Seo Dawon simply walked ahead as if he had not heard Koo Hui-seo’s voice.

I hesitated for a while because I didn’t know how to react. Koo Hui-seo’s lips did not budge one inch, but I could hear his low voice once again at my ears.

[…Next time, I’d like to show you a better impression of me]

Afterwards, as if noise-canceling earphones had been removed, all of a sudden I could hear all sorts of small sounds.

I looked at Koo Hui-seo, subconsciously fiddling at my ears. Perhaps I wasn’t following my ghostly servant well, distracted by the new compatriot. Seo Dawon came to my side after walking a distance away from me.

“I-I’m coming.” I was a bit concerned about Koo Hui-seo’s presence behind me, but I decided to keep quiet for now. I decided it wouldn’t be too late to slowly digest all that had happened after we left this area.

* * *

After that, we safely returned to our room and shared all that had happened with Jung Garam, who had already arrived.

The treasure hunter’s party seemed to have bought time quite smoothly. As we had expected, when Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak met, neither cared about Kim Sangyoon as they ripped into each other.

“Moon Issak, that bastard, asked Kim Sangyoon, who returned from a bathroom break, to immediately bring some wine.”

“Everything’s fine, right?”

“Yeah. That means no one cared about him.”

Furthermore, Jung Garam said that he gained a sense of the current situation as he eavesdropped on their dinner conversation. “Jaemin seems to be anxious about his guild certification. In order to qualify for tax benefits, your guild’s grade must be at least an A-, but I guess they aren’t willing to hand that out. Moon Issak says that new guilds can’t be admitted without proper verification of official institutional quests. He goaded Bae Jaemin, saying how guild members of that level definitely needed official verifications on their quests…”

“I guess he wants to act as he did with the Red Lotus.” Seo Dawon said without hiding his amusement while listening. Jung Garam nodded. I blinked, ignorant of their references. Fortunately, Jung Garam clarified for me.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: How do you guys feel about mister chimera? We'll be seeing more of him in the following chapters.

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Chapter 85

Chapter 85

“When we first formed the [Red Lotus] guild, we started at the A- rank without quest certification.” Jung Garam said.

“What is a quest certification…?” I raised my hand; I hadn’t heard of any of this before. I’ve never been in a guild before, so I had no idea how they earned their ratings.

Fortunately, Seo Dawon didn’t criticize me and answered patiently, “You know how the government decides a guild’s competence, from AAA to C rank, through an annual screening, right?”

“Ah. Okay.” That was something I had heard vaguely here and there, so I nodded.

I think the government usually reviewed the nation’s guilds in March. Didn’t the larger guilds hire new members in January and February to prepare for the March screening?

“So, aside from the usual annual screening, there’s also a screening for first-time guilds. They’re rated based on the guild’s capital and the rank of the guildmaster and their members.”

“At this point, if you receive a shit rating, it’s a slippery slope to utter ruin.” Jung Garam, who had been silently listening, bluntly added.

Well, Users have eyes, after all… Most guild-hunting Users would choose a guild based on their size and rating.

So if you were to earn the lowest guild rating in the first assessment, you couldn't hope for an influx of new guild members. The easiest road to raising their rating (recruitment of new guild members) at the screening next year will naturally have been blocked.

Taking that into consideration, Jung Garam's insistence that a guild's initial rating could mean the difference between life or death was not an exaggeration. [1]

"Then…is that 'quest certification' something that's needed to get a high rating?"

"Yeah. It's actually optional, but a proper validation will drastically increase your rating. You can't pass A rank without going through this process." Seo Dawon said, frowning. "However, these quests are, in reality, unpaid busy work from the government."

"Really?"

"To give an example, 'Find a thousand needles on a sandy beach'? Things like that? That's why I applied for a 'special exam' for the Red Lotus guild."

So, instead of suffering through boring and time-consuming quests, Seo Dawon gambled with the condition that all guild members would get a perfect score on the battle competency screening review. The Red Lotus had passed this screening.

"I guess Jaemin wanted to copy this." Seo Dawon said.

"How damn funny. I guess he really loves the Red Lotus more than anyone else." Jung Garam laughed at Bae Jaemin and his attempt to copy the Red Lotus's path to verification. However, he soon continued with a self-satisfied–schadenfreude-laden–expression. "Ah, Dawon-hyung. I laughed my head off watching those two talk."

"Who? Moon Issak and Bae Jaemin?"

“Yeah.”

Apparently, despite Bae Jaemin’s saccharine brown-nosing, Moon Issak would not budge.

“Bae Jaemin kept going on and on about HaHae guild’s capital, and Moon Issak cut him straight off. He said, ‘As a guild master, isn’t it your responsibility to manage quest certification?’ In other words, he refuses to help, and if Bae Jaemin doesn’t feel like following through, then he just won’t receive those extra points.” Jung Garam lounged on the sofa and giggled, “You should have seen the tension in that bastard’s jaw when Moon Issak finished speaking.”

“Hmm…” However, Seo Dawon did not follow his fellow guild member in laughing but, instead, adopted a thoughtful expression. “I heard that the special screening was abolished after Red Lotus took that path.”

“That’s why Bae Jaemin is so pissed off! The guild that passed the special screening–that sounds so fucking cool, right? So, he tried to retread that path; too bad he ran into Moon Issak. Someone hard-headed like that wouldn’t cooperate with him.”

He continued to laugh, elated that Bae Jaemin wouldn’t be able to make the spectacular debut with the special screening as the priest had wanted.

However, Seo Dawon thought differently, “The request for the special screening is highly likely to be granted–there’s precedence since it’s been allowed for Red Lotus before. Moon Issak, that rude scum, is just trying to raise the ransom costs in the negotiations. He’s just barely the lowest rung on the organizational ladder, anyway.”

“Really? Then, hyung, are you just going to sit there and watch that happen?” Jung Garam asked with a frown.

Seo Dawon smiled, “Of course not. They’re going to fail the special screening.”

I had wondered how he was so certain, but Seo Dawon did not elaborate anymore after that. Jung Garam also fell into quiet contemplation. Looking between the two, I suddenly remembered something; I asked Jung Garam, “By the way, what happened with the [Black Market]? Moon Issak didn’t ask Sangyoon-ssi anything about it?”

“The invitation was delivered to him before the meal, so there was barely a chance to talk. All they did was to exchange cordial courtesies as they sat down at the table.”

While listening to Jung Garam, I recalled Kim Sangyoon’s state as he came back to the room.

He sprawled onto the bed without changing his clothes… Well, I guess even if he didn’t do much, it was tiring enough to witness Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak fighting.

“Is that so? If nothing happened, then that’s good… Since he’s sprawled out all by himself over there, I was worried something had happened,” I said.

“Ah, I put him to sleep.”

“What? Why?”

“He kept on pacing around–a distracted mess.” Jung Garam said, grumpily.

Looking at his annoyed expression, my head throbbed. “…You didn’t hit him, did you?”

“Who the hell do you think I am?” Jung Garam stuck out his lower lip petulantly. “I used my skills to neatly put him to sleep. And, if you’re so worried about him, take Kim Sangyoon with you from now on. He’s fiercely uneasy without you there.”

“A-are you sure? That can’t be true…Rather, he seems more uncomfortable with me there…”

“Hmph. It’s none of my business.”

What is he saying?

I looked at Jung Garam oddly, but Jung Garam only turned away, nose upturned in the air. I tried to press him further with more questions, but Seo Dawon suddenly jumped up from his seat and approached the shuttered window in the living room.

“She’s here.” He beckoned to me, as if calling me to his side.

‘Huh?’ So I looked down, following Seo Dawon’s gaze; A middle-aged woman, who just stepped out of a luxury sedan, was being escorted by Ahn hospital’s staff. Although it was a bit difficult to guess her age due to her jet black hair done in an updo, I guessed she was a 60-year-old madame due to her wrinkled hands and the stubborn set of her mouth.

“Who’s that?” I asked.

“Koo Hui-seo’s biological mother.”

I gasped.

She came because the curse placed upon her son lifted? As my eyes chased her until she disappeared through the front doors of the hospital ward, I thought I could never know a person’s true colors through their outward appearance.

At first glance, she looked like a gracious hostess of a rich family; she did not look like the type of person to hex her son for years.

As I watched her walk away with complicated emotions squirming about inside, my train of thought was interrupted. “Where’s her familiar?” Seo Dawon muttered.

“Familiar?”

“The Witch’s cat. I don’t see it.” Seo Dawon stared at the scenery with more focus than me, searching for the cat that was known to be a Witch’s travel companion.

After listening to him, I carefully examined the scene. Just in front of the main gate, I glimpsed something white in her arms. “I think she’s holding it in her arms? If the cat is white, I mean.”

“Good. Then, I’m sure she’s here for Koo Hui-seo.” Seo Dawon smiled, satisfied.

Not long after she entered the hospital, a patient stretcher came out; the Witch followed shortly behind. Additionally, next to her, a man that appeared to be in charge of the hospital’s ward bowed his head. He seemed to be saying something to her. I could perceive that he was incredibly embarrassed.

I looked at the stretcher–Koo Hui-seo was most likely lying there. I couldn’t confirm that, however, because his face was covered with cloth as if he were a corpse.

The white cat, which I could not see easily earlier, was seated at the head of the stretcher.

“…Will he be alright?”

“He’ll do fine. After all, he wouldn’t want to be locked again like earlier.”

No, but, I was worried about Koo Hui-seo’s safety, not ours…

It was then.

Suddenly, the white cat that had been looking at Koo Hui-seo swerved its head towards me; I involuntarily flinched and fell back from the window.

Don’t tell me, did I get caught gawking at them?

“It’s fine. After all, familiars only follow the Witch’s judgment.” Seo Dawon closed the blinds, laughing. [2]

TL: More information on the structure of guilds. As always~ the beaurocracy is strong.

Footnotes

1. The original idiom, literally translated, would be something like ‘Divide the fate/ Divide life from death.’
2. A bit of a weird choice by the author, but I believe he’s saying that the cat will only follow a witch’s direct orders and won’t act on its own.

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Chapter 86

Chapter 86

The next day, we checked out of the hospital ward at 5 am.

Jung Garam had installed some surveillance skills in Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak's rooms. According to him, Moon Issak must have been itching to go to the [Black Market]; he immediately checked out after dinner.

Seo Dawon, after hearing that, had said, "We'd better get out of here quickly as well. It's not good to run into Bae Jaemin too often."

"Um. Yeah." So, I woke up Kim Sangyoon who was deep asleep and told him that we'd be leaving the hospital at dawn. We stayed up all night waiting for Bae Jaemin to fall asleep.

"I think he's asleep. He's completely stopped moving." Jung Garam said.

At the Treasure Hunter's signal, we hurried to the first-floor lobby. I was nervous, but, fortunately, we didn't see Bae Jaemin.

"…..?"

However, unlike the first day we checked in, the annex was cluttered. It was dawn–the sun was yet to rise…Why were there so many people here compared to the first morning?

"We got your car on standby." Just in time, a young hospital valet employee politely extended Kim Sangyoon's care keys to the Warrior.

I asked him a question, as if I were entertaining a casual, passing thought. “It’s dawn, but it’s so crowded?”

“Ah, yes. There’s an event prepared in the afternoon.” The employee smiled and answered kindly at the sudden question. I nodded and didn’t ask any more questions.

Of course, it’s not like I trusted his answer. The facial expressions and actions of the Ahn Hospital employees who were rushing about didn’t seem like those that seem to be in a hurry to prepare for an event. Most of all, unlike before, no security guards were covering the small hallway next to the pool.

“Haaah…” I was not the only one to notice this strange sense of disharmony; Kim Sangyoon who bobbed his head silently while he was in the lobby as we were checking out sighed deeply as soon as the door to his car closed.

Then, with an anxious look on his face, he asked as if he was hanging onto me for dear life, “U-um. We aren’t going to get into trouble, are we? The atmosphere is a bit frightening…”

“It’s probably…not our fault?”

“Right? If we were caught, they wouldn’t cordially see us off like this.”

“Yeah…..”

Despite my reassurances, I was also similarly nervous. I looked at Seo Dawon sitting in the back through the rearview mirror.

Seo Dawon stared straight at me, already predicting that I would look towards him, and shook his head. He responded, reassuringly, “It’s probably because of Koo Hui-seo, but that incident can’t be traced back to us. So, don’t worry.”

“We divided and plotted an elaborate plan for that reason.” Jung Garam chimed in.

We drove quickly on the quiet road.

“If, by any chance, something happens, please contact me immediately.” Kim Sangyoon said as he patted my chest. We arrived in front of my home far sooner–the ride took far less time than it took to drive to the hospital. Judging by his words and attitude, he looked far more frightened than me; I had to appease him, saying everything would be fine.

***

Rrring–

“……Huh?”

As soon as I entered the home–after reassuring Kim Sangyoon and sending him off–my cell phone suddenly rang, surprising me.

I was a bit flustered–the caller was a strange number I did not recognize and I had no one intimate enough to call at this hour; suddenly, though, I remembered I gave my contact information to Koo Hui-seo. A bit doubtful, I took the call… “… Hello?”

[Did you get home safely?]

It really was Koo Hui-seo.

As soon as I heard his voice, I tried to hand over the phone to Seo Dawon.

However, Seo Dawon gestured as if he wanted me to be the one to receive the phone call. Noncommittally, I placed the receiver back on my cheek and continued, “Yes. I’ve arrived safely.”

[The conversation with Mother went well. She doesn’t seem to be suspicious of me, either.]

At the good news, I released a sigh and looked at Seo Dawon. He also nodded, as if he could hear the phone call well.

Then, Koo Hui-seo continued after a brief pause. [I'm supposed to meet my brother next week as well.] He said that after escaping from the war, Koo Kyungman contacted him first.

That younger brother did not show his face in front of him for two years as he rotted away in Ahn Hospital, but, after leaving the ward, he contacted him to say his greetings within two hours. Koo Hui-seo's laughing voice seemed somehow hollow and eerie.

[He pretended to be so concerned about my health…so, I lied a little.]

"What kind of lie……?"

[I told him that my mother had released me since it wouldn't be long before I died. When I said I wanted to see him at least once before he died, he tried hard to suppress his joy.]

I nodded–it was a pretty plausible lie. Originally, 'Koo Hui-seo' was someone that cared a great deal for his brother, so I thought that Koo Kyungman wouldn't suspect him. "That's a good plan."

[Mother said she would be out of the house next Thursday, so that's when he'd said he'll come. And, this is my personal opinion…I don't think Kyungman will come empty-handed that day.]

"Empty-handed?" I tried to read between the lines.

Koo Hui-seo continued without delay [He'll definitely try to kill me through poison. He's never been a patient child… After all, he would have no reason to hold doubts until time is up if he goes through with his scheme.]

Though I was stunned by his words, I didn't show any outward signs of surprise. I looked at Seo Dawon, as if asking what we should do.

He answered without much hesitation, “He has a point. I guess we’ll have to prepare in advance.”

As if responding to Seo Dawon, Koo Hui-seo said, [So, I’m saying… Would Lee-kyung-nim like to visit that day as well? I don’t yet have many cards up my sleeve…Just in case I need help.]

Although it seemed like he needed Seo Dawon’s outstanding ability rather than me…Anyway, Seo Dawon nodded at his words. “I understand,” I replied to Koo Hui-seo.

* * *

“Long time no see.”

It was soon the D-day that Koo Hui-seo talked about.

Seo Dawon and I waited for night to fall and went to the designated address we were given.

There stood a large and luxurious mansion–not on the hub’s main street but at the outskirts. Koo Hui-seo appeared when we, after passing through ginormous gates, knocked on the door to the three-story mansion.

His complexion definitely looked more human than the last time we saw him, but he still looked quite thin. In addition to the cane he was holding, it didn’t seem like he was back to normal yet.

“About Seo Dawon-nim…” Koo Hui-seo said.

“He’ll join when Koo Kyungman arrives.”

“Ahh… I see.” Koo Hui-seo must have thought I came alone, but I had not yet summoned Seo Dawon because of the 30-minute limitation.

However, I couldn’t confess that restriction to Koo Hui-seo, so, keeping Seo Dawon in view, I nonchalantly asked, “What about Koo Kyungman?”

“He’ll be here soon; he already notified me that he departed from his home.”

Seo Dawon walked around the house, checking its interior; next to him, Jung Garam was doing the same. “What do you think about asking Koo Hui-seo for this house?” Jung Garam sat on a fancy sofa, tapping his feet on the ground. He didn’t seem to be paying close attention, but his slouched attitude only surfaced for a moment.

“I hear a car.” The treasure hunter lowered his voice, informing us of the outside situation. “He’s arrived.”

As Jung Garam said, the man exiting the car was Koo Kyungman

Koo Hui-seo checked the situation through an intercom screen. “You may wait here.” He said, opening a small door next to the living room and guiding me into the secret space.

There was an ingenious gap in the wall in the secret room through which you could see the entirety of the living room but still remain hidden from those within that room. It seemed to be a space designed for this purpose in the first place.

“The servant will guide Koo Kyungman around. There’s no fear of getting caught unless you make a loud noise, so please keep an eye on me from here.”

“All right.”

After our talk, Koo Hui-seo left the secret room; not long after his departure, the door to the living room opened.

As Koo Hui-seo had said, his brother followed a servant into the living room. Though I had never actually seen him with my own eyes, the man that appeared was not that different from how he looked in Seo Dawon’s memories. I felt a strong sense of repulsion as my insides writhed.

“You’ve come.”

“Hyung-nim.”

However, the rising disgust soon subsided. The door opened again and Koo Hui-seo entered, pushed in a wheelchair by another servant.

As soon as he saw Koo Hui-seo, Koo Kyungman jumped up and knelt at his brother’s feet, shedding tears. To a stranger, the sight would depict a perfect brotherhood.

TL: It’s been a while since we’ve had a bonus chap >.< Thanks What? Duck! for the kofi!

I’ve been translating a bit slower bc of PhD program applications~ Still, thank you for reading!

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Chapter 87

Chapter 87

“I believed in the madam, but…” After a long look at Koo Hui-seo, Koo Kyungman gripped his skinny fingers–his murmurs tinged with resentment.

By madam, he must be referring to Koo Hui-seo’s biological mother, right? Logically, I knew they were half-brothers, but the title ‘madame,’ really showcased the distance.

Koo Hui-seo patted him on the back without saying anything more. His brother buried his head between Hui-seo’s thin thighs, similarly silent.

I was even confused when I saw Koo Kyungman’s agitated back. Was this really the man that left Koo Hui-seo to rot from the inside out in despair?

“It’s not all Mother’s fault. I… also committed some wrongs against you.” Koo Hui-seo’s expression, as seen from my perspective, was formidable. He looked down at his sobbing brother’s head with indifferent eyes, looking very tired and annoyed.

However, that face vanished in an instant when Koo Kyungman lifted his reddened eyes.

Murmuring in that trembling voice with a shady smile, Koo Hui-seo appeared to be nothing more than a wicked man who had no one to rely on after being released from captivity. Koo Kyungman was definitely taken in by that performance.

Even before his brother was finished speaking, Koo Kyungman jumped up and spoke in a rather exaggerated manner, “It couldn’t be helped because of your illness. My life wasn’t threatened.”

“Still…”

“Please don’t let that sin remain in your heart. It was better than letting hyung-nim hurt himself; this was the better outcome. I…”

He’s talking about Koo Hui-seo’s mental illness and his outbursts in which he stabbed him? Koo Hui-seo lowered his head, as if he were moved by his brother’s forgiveness.

In between looking at Koo Hui-seo, the Red Dragon guildmaster nervously checked his watch and knelt at his brother’s feet once more. Maybe he’s going to say what was truly on his mind now.

“Hyung-nim, by the way…What is madam saying? I can’t believe that your condition is now terminal…”

“Ahh, that’s right…I called you here for that reason.” Koo Hui-seo looked up, wiping his damp cheek. Surprisingly, it looked as if he had really shed tears in the meantime. “Yesterday the doctor said the same. Mother too… They said I wouldn’t be able to make it through this year.”

“That’s…”

“And Mother…You know this well, but she’s not the type to bat an eyelid at my death. After examining several times and confirming that my body was fully destroyed… She asked what would happen to the [Red Dragon] guild rather than to ask after my body–saying it would be a disaster if there was no suitable successor…”

The look on Koo Kyungman’s face, after hearing those words, suddenly twisted violently. Of course, he hid this expression before Koo Hui-seo raised his head again, but his rigid jaw didn’t lose its tension.

Then, Koo Hui-seo continued, giving no indication he noticed the signs of tension. “I said to her, ‘what are you implying,’ especially as you’re already the guild master, but… You probably already know. She’s left you that seat temporarily; she doesn’t mean to give you the guild.”

“…It’s because I’m lacking.”

“Don’t say that. Mother is being overly greedy.”

And, Seo Dawon, who was listening to their conversation, muttered ‘Aha!’ as if he had realized something. “So that’s why he wanted his brother dead–even cooperating by confiding Koo Hui-seo separately in that hospital ward.”

It was not until I heard the Mage’s mutters that I fully understood Koo Kyungman’s tempestuous expression.

He must have realized that he was on the verge of losing his position. It’s not clear under what conditions he took hold of the guild master seat, but, from his expression, the situation must be more unstable than I had thought.

Koo Hui-seo must have known all about that instability; with that in mind, he opened his mouth without hesitation. “I…I think you should continue to be the guild master.”

“……” Koo Kyungman, without confirming or denying, simply looked at his hand which was in his brother’s grasp. At first glance, he appeared to have been avoiding answering while in a difficult position, but, looking at the line of his mouth, he seemed to instead be holding back his rising anger.

However, what Koo Hui-seo said next was even more shocking. “Because, if you’re the guild master… I can survive, out from underneath Mother.”

With these eerie words, Koo Kyungman could no longer remain silent. He clenched his free fist and spoke in an apologetic tone, as if he had already given up. “But, hyung-nim, if the madam objects, I have to step

down. And I have little lingering attachment for the guild master position…”

“Before I die.” Koo Hui-seo cut his brother off, “Mother is thinking of making a new heir.”

Like a bomb, a frigid atmosphere exploded in the living room.

The obedient brother mask he had been trying to maintain until then had disappeared from Koo Kyungman’s face–shattered all at once. It was an expression like he had been stabbed in the back of his head by long-held suspicions.

Of course, whether or not Koo Kyungman looked that way, Koo Hui-seo kept spouting provocations. “My body has long been out of my control. No matter what disgusting thing Mother forces upon me from now on, I… can’t refuse. Honestly, it’s always been this way.”

“What are you saying?”

“She’s trying to search for someone to give birth to my child. A new heir. I happened to overhear her when I was pretending to sleep.”

“……”

“The reason why Mother left, today, was to visit a doctor outside the hub. If I really were to have a child, connected by my bloodline…”

Koo Hui-seo lowered his head and sobbed, saying that his mother would attempt to kill him as soon as that child saw the light of the world. He pretended to be someone who was mentally torn to rags due to such a desperate situation.

Then, looking at his brother after being hit in the face by these revelations, bloodthirst slowly grew in Koo Kyungman’s expression. He tightly closed his gaping mouth shut.

Acting as if he had no desire to raise his head, Koo Hui-seo lamented. “So, can Kyungman-ie get me out of here today? I don’t want to spend the

rest of my life in hell…”

After restating that all this was for him, Koo Hui-seo looked at his brother with a look of anticipation; Koo Kyungman rose to his feet without answering. He outstretched his hand to his brother.

“Knngh….”

“Ha, fuck….What did you say?”

I summoned Seo Dawon just before Koo Hui-seo was strangled by Koo Kyungman, but the Mage had not yet intervened. Koo Kyungman lost his rationality and began yelling–his face just as red as his strangled victim. “I….I! Fucker, do you think I’ve been taking care of you–calling you hyung-nim–just to be treated like this?”

“Cough, Krnnk….”

“Heir? You’re making me laugh. Who are you to stand in my way? You should have just died in that hospital ward!”

“Ugh……”

“Why’d you have to return alive and create all this trouble!”

Koo Hui-seo could not scratch properly with his skinny hands and dull fingernails; they slipped pathetically off the attacker’s arm.

Seeing that show of struggle, Koo Kyungman placed more strength in his hands. “Do you know why I played along with this family pretense?” He asked his brother, smiling cruelly.

It was questionable if Koo Hui-seo, whose eyes began to upturn in his head, could hear him; grumbling, Koo Kyungman placed his brother in the wheelchair with his hands–veiny from the expended effort. “I had a spot as the guild master as long as I called you brother–it was worth it.”

“……”

“And how nice was it for you to develop a mental illness and to get out of my way. I was really grateful, back then.”

The taunt seemed to have been successfully delivered to Koo Hui-seo. A lone tear dripped across his cheeks in the midst of his convulsions.

I looked between the scene and Seo Dawon nervously, wondering when the mage was going to intervene. What if Koo Hui-seo really dies or suffers some permanent damage…? However, Seo Dawon restrained me from moving.

During that scuffle, Koo Hui-seo’s neck eventually bent in a humanly impossible direction with a cracking sound.

His neck seemed to have broken from purely the other’s grip strength. Given that Koo Kyungman was a User that primarily used gauntlets, such a feat wouldn’t be so difficult for him.

TL: Thanks for joining me for this chapter! I’m always reminded of how MC is so kind for this world of Users–he still had optimism, before, that Koo Kyungman was actually a filial brother when he first heard Koo Hui-seo’s story…but that optimism is probably dashed now.

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Chapter 88

Chapter 88

‘What are we going to do now!’ I thought as I looked at Seo Dawon.

Koo Hui-seo died! I felt a shuddering pain from guilt when I saw Koo Hui-seo dropping in his brother’s hands. Didn’t he call us over just in case something like this happened?!

“Haa…” Meanwhile, after killing his brother, Koo Kyungman put Koo Hui-seo’s body back in the wheelchair and flopped casually back into the seat opposite of him.

After that, Koo Kyungman took a cigarette out of somewhere from his body and lit it; from his relaxed attitude, the murder must have been premeditated, and he had probably made preparations for clean up. His actions seemed to focus purely on himself after the heinous crime.

‘What on earth is he thinking?’ Even as I stared at Seo Dawon, I couldn’t understand what anyone here was thinking. As I thought that, the Mage opened the door to the secret room–a very late start.

Of course, Koo Kyungman would have thought it a sudden appearance. He looked at us, coughing out the cigarette smoke he breathed in deeply in his astonishment.

Surprised pupils widened, perhaps recognizing Seo Dawon’s face.

“….W-What, who are you people!”

“You’re not asking because you really don’t know me, right?” Seo Dawon smiled gently and raised his right palm upwards; a golden sphere manifested above that palm.

Koo Kyungman’s spirit seemed to have escaped his body from shock. “Seo Dawon…weren’t you dead?” He muttered, confused, but he still clapped his hands straight away.

Immediately, Koo Kyungman’s elbows colored black, and gauntlets formed over his arms. Certain combat items can be summoned through gestures, and his gauntlets seemed to be one of those superior items.

However, Seo Dawon paid no attention and fired a skill–like a frisbee–at Koo Kyungman.

Boom–!

A crashing noise–perhaps the skill hit its mark–erupted. Particles of light exploded out like fireworks.

Sadly, after the dazzling light show, the dust settled to show the other’s arms crossed over in an X: a perfect block. He grinned chillingly through the gaps between his arms and shook off the effects of the skill.

“What is this attack? It only tickled?”

“…….”

“Maybe it’s because you’ve taken a break for three years…Are you a has-been now, Seo Dawon?”

Seo Dawon did not reply and instead turned over both palms.

I looked nervously between the two. ‘My ability as a Necromancer is too dreadful…Is Seo Dawon going to be pushed back?’

It was common sense that the higher the ability of the Necromancer, the stronger the servant. In addition, Koo Kyungman was not merely bluffing;

he was gradually narrowing the distance between them by punching away Seo Dawon's skills.

"Are you really Seo Dawon? What's with these ticklish attacks?" Koo Kyungman did not hide his smirk.

Not only did he block the opposing skills, but he also punched powerfully towards Seo Dawon; a black light, like a laser, erupted from his fist.

Seo Dawon immediately moved to avoid the attack fired straight at him; the laser crashed into the wall right behind his original position. Without delay, Seo Dawon prepared another skill.

However, Koo Kyungman looked at Seo Dawon, scrutinizing him; he stopped in place and roared with laughter. "Hahahaha! Instead of blocking that sort of flimsy attack, you avoid it?"

"……"

"You couldn't block it? Are you sure you're Seo Dawon? Except for his flirty face, your skills compared to his are like heaven and earth!"

Every jeer thrown the Mage's way felt like my fault. I was also afraid of the tension that I could see lining his face, which was stiffening in a way I had never seen before.

Though the two had not seriously clashed yet, Koo Kyungman clearly seemed at ease. And if a low-level loser like me could feel the difference, there's no way the two weren't aware of it as well.

Koo Kyungman smiled and stretched his arms, knowing that the momentum was in his favor. "Well, I guess I'll find out once I grab you and rip all four limbs off…!"

There was a sound like air splitting; in the blink of an eye, Koo Kyungman leaped over Seo Dawon's head. He held his hands above his head, like he meant to hammer the Mage. "[Hammer Upper!]"

Fortunately, Seo Dawon quickly escaped out of the attack's range; when Koo Kyungman pounded the floor right where he originally was, the attack penetrated the floor and revealed the cement underneath. If Seo Dawon had been hit by that, his insides may have burst out of his body.

"You're still the same with those skills befitting a monkey." Rather than being intimidated by the broken floor, the Mage continued to provoke his opponent.

After hearing Seo Dawon's provocation, Koo Kyungman slowly stood up from his kneeling position, twisting his thin lips. Clenching his hand in a fist, he drew his thumb across his neck. "Don't expect me to kill you as painlessly as I did before."

Then, with a murderous expression, he began to roll his shoulders as if he were preparing to throw a baseball.

The problem was that an unusual air current began to gather and swirl around Koo Kyungman's fists. It was black and gave off a nasty smell; as soon as the scent filled the room, Jung Garam, who was standing silently next to me, dragged us back into the secret room and closed the door.

"Hey, I can't see anything!"

The view was limited by the narrowness of the gap; I couldn't see Seo Dawon properly.

Instead of answering, Jung Garam took out a dagger and drew a round symbol on the door. Only when the symbol glowed blue did he look back at me and say, "Is anything going to change because you watched them?"

"But……"

"Hyung wouldn't lose to someone like Kyungman, right? If that happened, I'd be the guildmaster instead."

As soon as he spoke, an unparalleled, deafening roar erupted.

A very dark fog began to fill the room. Oddly, the smoke that filled the living room did not seep through the cracks into our location. When the smoke reached the gap, the round symbol engraved onto the door sparked blue; I realized that Jung Garam had set up the symbol to protect me within the secret space. I wasn't sure what that fog was…but surely it wouldn't be good for my health.

'Then, is Seo Dawon okay?' I was sure he would be fine, but I couldn't help but feel a tenseness in my heart that would not be relieved. Continuously, I stared at the gap. Suddenly, something sounded as if it fell amid the fog; at the same time, the black fog disappeared as if it had been washed away.

"Seo Dawon…!"

The scene, after the fog cleared, was shocking.

Seo Dawon was lying on the floor–eyes closed as if he had lost consciousness. Koo Kyungman stared down at the Mage with a creepy smile.

'…No way, is he dead?' Well, Seo Dawon was dead already…so then he must just be unconscious?

"How the hell did he survive?"

However, this was not the time to be relieved at Seo Dawon's state. Whether dead or not, Seo Dawon was out of commission. After tapping the Mage with his shoe a few times, Koo Kyungman started walking towards the secret room.

As soon as he stepped in front of the door, he immediately punched without any hesitation. The door ripped off its hinges, like a piece of paper tearing away, and landed on the floor with a thud. Soon Koo Kyungman and I, trembling, faced each other without any obstacles blocking the way.

Koo Kyungman scoured my ashen complexion and soon strode right in front of me. "You. What relationship do you have with Seo Dawon."

“……”

Speechless with fear and despair, I just looked up at him. The other grinned and grabbed me by the collar, lifting me up easily–enough that my feet dangled above the ground.

“They always don’t answer when I ask nicely.” With that, Koo Kyungman clenched the hand that wasn’t holding me up into a fist and raised it high.

I closed my eyes tightly and grit my molars in preparation for imminent pain. Simultaneously, I felt the air rip apart as if a fist was flying at my side.

“Arghh!!” Just before the fist reached me, Koo Kyungman screamed and let me go. I opened my eyes in surprise at the falling sensation.

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Chapter 89

Chapter 89

Koo Kyungman, in front of me, was in an appalling state.

What on earth had happened in that short time? He was floating in the air, kicking wildly and squirming his neck.

I didn’t know what was going on, but I may not get another chance to run away again. Without taking my eyes off of Koo Kyungman, I retreated until, not long afterwards, I felt something touch my back. I looked back, frightened.

It was Seo Dawon.

“You…..!” I was surprised but, at the same time, overcome with relief. Of course, Seo Dawon wouldn’t die so obediently! Without realizing it, a smile involuntarily bloomed on my face.

However, Seo Dawon, looking down at me, frowned as if he were dissatisfied with something, and I became a bit self-conscious. Seo Dawon reached out to me with a sigh, “You’re so good at muttering to yourself when you’re alone, why did you shut up now?”

“W-what…”

“You should buy some time by saying whatever. If you had gotten hit by him, your ribs would have been crushed.”

You were over there, fainted, and now you're nagging at me? Well…I suppose he was just acting.

I had a lot to say, but I chose to keep quiet and grab his hand to stand up.

A soft voice spoke from behind my back. "Thank you. You made it easy."

I turned around to look at who spoke and almost screamed. Koo Hui-seo, who had surely died of a broken neck, was standing still and looking my way! Koo Hui-seo laughed at my astounded expression, covering his mouth with his hands. "I see you were worried."

"H-How did this happen!"

"It was just a petty trick." Afterwards, one of Koo Hui-seo's fingers, which were covering his mouth, dyed black–it looked as if that finger turned into a branch. Of course, as soon as I blinked, his finger returned to normal.

"Kughhh, Urgh…" At that moment, Koo Kyungman, who was still struggling midair, sounded as if all the breath sapped out of him and drooped.

Without dropping his smile, Koo Hui-seo approached his unconscious brother; Koo Kyungman's body slowly lowered from the air. It felt as if some invisible entity was handing him over to his brother.

I couldn't see it well before, but there were black strands around the neck of the fainted Koo Kyungman: that was probably the culprit behind his struggles and suffocation.

As Koo Kyungman fully collapsed into Koo Hui-seo's embrace, I could see something long and black, like a string, was connected to Koo Kyungman's back. When Koo Hui-seo extended his arm, the string slithered up his sleeve like a snake.

'Did he have a weapon like that?'

However, before I could ask, Seo Dawon spoke first. “We’re giving you exactly 1 year to hold Koo Kyungman in custody; you got that?”

“Of course.”

In accordance with the first vengeful ghost contract, Koo Hui-seo must not be allowed to let Kyungman freely escape, causing a setback in resolving the ghost’s grudges.

Or course, the contract with Koo Hui-seo placed several restrictions on him; he could not betray us voluntarily. However, it was also true that the situation was a bit uncomfortable for us.

I asked Koo Hui-seo, “Koo Kyungman…What are you going to do with him for that 1 year?”

Koo Hui-seo laughed, sounding as if he was at the last dregs of his sanity, but he didn’t hesitate to answer. “First we should go to my room.”

* * *

Without another word, we followed Koo Hui-seo up to his room while the housekeepers cleaned up the gruesome parlor.

His room was on the second floor of the mansion. I thought, as soon as we opened the door, that his room felt very dark. Each window was swathed in endless darkness through layers of blackout curtains.

Koo Hui-seo entered the dark room without hesitation. When Seo Dawon turned on the lights, he paused with a short exclamation. “Is it a bit dark? I tend to avoid the sunlight, so….”

After speaking, Koo Hui-seo ordered two of his gifted servants to lay Koo Kyungman carefully on the bed. The two users quietly closed the door afterwards, not sparing a second glance at the unconscious man as they left.

Koo Hui-seo waved his hand gently as he looked at his brother laying on his bed; something that looked like that black band I saw earlier popped out of his sleeve, crawled along the floor and climbed up the bed.

When it found Koo Kyungman, it split into several branches–black strings gagging his mouth and binding his hands and feet. They completely restricted any movement. Then, he guided us to some seats at a table. "Where should I start…." His low voice spoke slowly. "To resist the curse, my body had lost many vital functions."

He spoke, implying that he wouldn't have been able to survive otherwise without these sacrifices. He frowned, "I've lost most of my ability to digest; it's almost impossible for me to eat food now."

After hearing those words, Seo Dawon immediately asked a keen question. "You need Koo Kyungman to recover your body?"

"Hmm, well no. Recovery is impossible. Besides, it's not just my digestive system that I've lost." He continued after sighing, "I'm now infertile."

I kept my gaze focused on his face in order to not drop my eyes to some *other locations*.

Of course, I was first struck by feelings of pity; I wondered if I could calmly talk about that loss if I had experienced the same. However, I found myself at a loss for words–unable to comfort him. Further, I couldn't wrap my head around the connection between Koo Kyungman and infertility.

As if he understood our confused silence, Koo Hui-seo added, calmly, "To be exact, many parts of my body had been fused as a chimera so ordinary sexual intercourse would be impossible. But this body needs to become the head of the [Red Dragon]…My position would be in danger if others knew I couldn't have children."

He explained that this guild was beholden to indispensable relatives that held guild funding within their palms; they were constrained by traditional

ideals such as inheritance by blood and keeping succession within the family.

“Then, are you going to have Koo Kyungman’s child be your successor?”

“Hmm…..”

Seo Dawon asked if he was going to use Koo Kyungman as a stallion–let him sow his seeds–and adopt the resulting child, disguising him as his true biological son. I, too, couldn’t imagine any other scheme than this in Koo Hui-seo’s mind.

However, Koo Hui-seo shook his head. “Kyungman-ie already has a child. I’ll handle that soon.”

“…….”

“And, I…I don’t have the confidence that I can raise Kyungman’s child as my own.” Koo Hui-seo smiled bitterly, “Wouldn’t it be painful if my adopted son grew up looking just like him?”

I guess that son would be viewed as the enemy’s child.

Even I would feel uncomfortable, so I could sympathize with his feelings. I became even more curious as to his plans with Koo Kyungman.

“So, I decided to get some help from Mother.” He said.

“With what?”

“I’m going to have Kyungman give birth to my baby.”

“……..What?” I looked at him with wide eyes; Seo Dawon gave a subtle frown.

What he said was so shocking that my mouth would not close. However, Koo Hui-seo continued without hesitation, paying no heed to our reactions.

“There’s a method for men to become pregnant as well. It’s not a medicine that many can easily get their hands on, but Mother knows a workshop.”

“…….”

“After adapting to the medicine, Kyungman can receive artificial insemination from a hospital outside the Hub.

To be honest, although Koo Kyungman did things worthy of death…I had no choice but to feel pity for the man. Looking at Koo Hui-seo’s crazy eyes as he raved about his plans, one could imagine how, whether or not the plan failed, Koo Kyungman’s remaining life would be spent in hell.

I didn’t know that he’d make his life hell…

“There will be noise if Koo Kyungman goes into hiding, leaving his guildmaster seat open.” Seo Dawon said.

“It’s okay…Kyungman-ie…will be retiring from an irreparable injury.”

“What are you thinking about?”

“First, I’m going to cut off both arms. It might be annoying for him, a gauntlet-wielding User, to retain the use of those during imprisonment.”

“Alright. When are you starting?”

“This evening.”

However, unlike me–immobilized from shock, Seo Dawon carefully asked Koo Hui-seo about his future plans. In that matter, all discussion of Koo Kyungman had ended.

TL: I’m back again with a double feature: Thanks Sam for the Kofi!

Ngl, I thought I was hallucinating when I was translating this chapter. That plan is…certainly a plan.

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Chapter 90

Chapter 90

After agreeing to receive monthly reports on Koo Kyungman's physical condition for a year, Seo Dawon took me to escape Koo Hui-seo's room.

In addition, Seo Dawon said he would need to personally confirm that Kyungman's arm was being cut off this evening, so we did not return to our home but settled, instead, in the guest room upstairs. A servant User guided us there.

As soon as the door closed, Seo Dawon said to Jung Garam, "Check it out."

What did he mean by that?

Unlike me, who was utterly puzzled, Jung Garam immediately closed his eyes at those words and recited his skill, "[Investigation]."

As soon as the [Investigation] skill activated, I heard a small pop, like something burst within my ear canals. Jung Garam opened his eyes, "I caught one. A wire-tap."

"Good."

"…Wire-tap?" I looked around, belatedly wary.

Seo Dawon gently grabbed at my shoulder as if to calm me down. "Well, it's normal to have a few around."

Jung Garam also calmly sat on the sofa; his reaction confirming the Mage's statement.

What do you mean normal! Normal people don't wire-tap their rooms!

About to protest, I anxiously thought, 'Don't tell me, is Koo Hui-seo going to change his mind?' He showed an extraordinary amount of madness, enough to hatch a scheme to get his half-brother pregnant. What if he has other self-interests?

"Why do you look so agitated?" Jung Garam asked curtly, looking at my face.

I hesitated to speak, seeing how easy-going he looked…but I eventually opened my mouth. "If he's bugging the rooms…Is Koo Hui-seo possibly up to something else?"

"If it's wire-taps you're worried about, those are probably installed in every room." Seo Dawon answered. "He's a bit crazy…but I don't think he'd be so crazy as to be unable to firmly grasp the situation he's in." Seo Dawon smiled softly, as if he read my anxious mind.

"I bet Koo Hui-seo is more interested in his new toy than us?" Jung Garam calmly added, glancing at me sideways from his seat on the sofa.

I was worried that they weren't vigilant enough, but I thought it would be meaningless for me to further air my concerns when they spoke in unison.

Eventually I walked over to the bed and flopped down. My body suddenly lost its strength, and I was overwhelmed with fatigue. "By any chance, the revenge that you guys want…You're not going to impregnate Bae Jaemin, right?"

"……."

"……."

While thinking of all that had happened today (Revenge, Koo Hui-seo, Koo Kyungman), my unfiltered thoughts suddenly popped out of my mouth.

They said nothing for quite some time. When I raised my head to look at them, their expressions were really unusual. “W-Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because of you, I imagined something nauseating.”

“If Lee-kyung-ie absolutely insists, I could help him, but…”

I quickly bowed my head and apologized to the two–they both seemed like they detested the idea. Nevertheless, their reactions were reassuring; it would have been difficult to be in the same team as those that thought the same way as Koo Hui-seo.

Yeah. No one would say anything weird about simple murder or some light torture…

Knock Knock–

It was then.

Suddenly, we heard a knock on the door. At first, I thought I was hearing things, but, seeing as how Seo Dawon and Jung Garam both also looked towards the door, it seems my ears heard properly.

Seo Dawon had preemptively terminated the summoning to leave himself some time for a face-to-face meeting with Koo Kyungman later in the evening, so I was the only one who could answer the door.

‘…There’s no way it’s Koo Hui-seo, right?’ I thought, as I opened the door.

“The madam has returned to the mansion. She has invited you to dinner; please come down to the first floor by 6:30.”

Fortunately, it wasn't Koo Hui-seo, but a servant who knocked on the door. He turned around and disappeared after that short remark.

An invite to dinner out of nowhere? And if it's the madam…He must be talking about Koo Hui-seo's mother.

"What should we do?" I asked.

"We have to go." Seo Dawon calmly replied, as if he had expected this.

No one came to the room until 6 p.m., but I could not relax and soothe my mind. Time flew fast, and it was soon time for dinner.

* * *

"This way."

When we descended to the first floor, the servant, waiting for us, guided us to our destination.

The door to the living room, where Koo Kyungman battled earlier (and had consequently been destroyed) was firmly closed and the inside could not be seen. We passed that door and went a little further inside; entering the heart of the mansion, we came upon a space like a glass greenhouse. There was a small garden within the house.

The garden's terrace was equipped with an outdoor table, with plates and knives set upon it. Perhaps that's tonight's dinner location. Fortunately, or unfortunately, no one was sitting at the table; I moved to the center of this space under the guidance of the servant.

The servant, after showing me to the table, took out the chair. As I took a seat, the chairs next to me were also moved out as well.

Did someone else arrive? Or at least, that's what I thought, until I–still frightened–saw Seo Dawon and Jung Garam sitting on the chairs with stiff expressions on their faces.

Currently, Seo Dawon and Jung Garam weren't summoned so they could not be seen by others. But for these two to take these seats…

"Meow."

But, before I could do anything, a white cat had appeared, without me noticing, on my plate. The cat appeared to be observing me–and my subsequent shock. It was the cat I saw with Koo Hui-seo, just a few days ago, as he was leaving the annex.

'This must be the witch's familiar…'

When I saw the cat, I was convinced that all that had happened was conducted under Koo Hui-seo's mother's directions. Maybe she knew we were the ones that rescued her son…If so, what could she be thinking?

I wanted to ask Seo Dawon for his opinion on this strange situation, but I heard an unfamiliar voice first.

"Long time no see."

Koo Hui-seo's mother, who I had seen when leaving the hospital, had appeared with a servant. She looked straight at Seo Dawon.

"…Yes. It has been a while." Seo Dawon lowered his eyes and greeted politely. He looked as if he was swallowing a wry smile.

After staring openly at Seo Dawon, Koo Hui-seo's mother turned her gaze towards me. It was impossible to guess her age from her knowing gaze; it felt like it pierced through me, tingling past my spine.

"Didn't I tell you that day that you'd be snapped in two?" [1]

"……"

“You didn’t listen……In the end, this is how we face each other again.”

I don’t understand why she’s saying the things she wants to say to Seo Dawon while looking at me…But, in any case, I understood from her words that Seo Dawon and she had known each other.

As a witch, she seems to have access to a rare ability, ‘[Prophecy]’. The two of them seem to have known each other in the past, and she seemed to have given Seo Dawon a warning–whether in the form of a prophecy or a curse.

‘Isn’t that a pretty deep connection?’

And the Mage didn’t say a word about this when we went to meet Koo Hui-seo…

Seo Dawon really doesn’t reveal his innermost thoughts but feels at ease to ask and uncover all that he’s curious about with me.

I kept paying attention to Seo Dawon’s uncanny calm expression even though my heart felt stuffy from the secretiveness of the man I thought I knew. Even though I knew that he wasn’t the type of man to feel discouraged by those words.

After hearing a ‘prophecy’ that he would suffer a huge defeat, dying, and signing a contract, Seo Dawon was now here with me. I don’t know how he reacted when he first heard her predictions…

The way she sat in her seat with a sneer clearly belied her intent to mock. Her malice could be felt by all those seated here.

I looked at Seo Dawon, who was silent, and eventually replied to her, “If you listen to the prophecy, can the future catastrophes be prevented?”

“Fate is merciful to the humble.”

In short, she’s saying that Seo Dawon died because he was a rude little bastard.

I placed one tightly clenched fist on my thigh and eventually retorted with something quite unlike me. “I guess you’re speaking from experience.”

“…….”

When she stared at me again, I smiled and said, “I’ll listen carefully.”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: MC – Murder and torture? Fine. Male impregnation? Absolutely not.

Also we’re at chapter 90! Only 10 to go till the big 100 😀

Footnotes

1. This idiom actually means “Suffer a big loss,” but I felt like the literal translation was sufficient and poetic.

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Chapter 91

Chapter 91

CW: Mentions of self-harm (but nothing in the present) for this chapter and the next

Strange silence flowed between us.

I had thought she'd get angry or retort sarcastically, but she looked at me in silence, bowed her head obliquely, and broke eye contact first.

As soon as she turned away, the servant standing behind her immediately placed his ear next to her mouth, listening to her words.

Even though the two were right in front of me, I couldn't hear her instructions. I don't know what courage bubbled up from within me, but, instead of getting nervous, I carefully paid attention to their actions.

But it seems like her instructions were irrelevant to our earlier conversation; the servant did not even glance at me, leaving the greenhouse as soon as his mistress's mouth stopped moving. After delivering her instructions, she smiled, alternating between looking at Seo Dawon and me. "I thought you've finally been placed on a leash… I guess your talent for seducing people still lingers after death."

"I'm flattered, Chairwoman Shin," Seo Dawon responded.

The conversation that followed was hard to follow.

Seo Dawon did not sit still, this time, and replied with a showy smile, calling her Chairman Shin and buttering up to her.

It felt as if he was flattering her, but his talent to provoke showed as he injected his mocking words with amusement.

Koo Hui-seo's mother, Chairwoman Shin, seemed to have derived the same conclusions as I had; a smile crossed her expressionless face for a brief moment.

"Thank you for returning Hui-seo to his rightful place," she said with a soft smile.

After she finished speaking, five servants entered the greenhouse with plates covered with cloches. The conversation continued naturally during dinner.

"For a while, talking about brotherhood or whatever…I was so worried that he would continue to speak soft-heartedly and be unable to return to his senses." Chairwoman Shin spoke, slowly, with a purposeful frown. However, I couldn't focus on her words; I had to focus on schooling my shocked expression at the way she ate.

Chairwoman Shin seemed to like Korean cuisine, tidily prepared wild vegetables and beef ribs were placed in front of her. [1] Marinated soy sauce crabs filled to the brim with eggs were cut into bite-sized pieces and placed at her right. [2]

However, behind Chairwoman Shin, an old servant wiped his hands thoroughly in a bowl filled with water, stepped forward, hand-squeezed the marinated crab, and fed it to Chairwoman Shin. And, naturally, she ate the crab that was placed near her mouth.

I thought that the scene before me was bizarre, but I turned my gaze away silently and pretended to concentrate on my share of food on the plate.

Do rich people usually eat like that….without lifting a single finger? It was so weird to see an adult eating with the help of others, like an infant…

I looked around, trying to puzzle out some unnoticed reasons for such behavior; at a second look, I noticed that there was no knife or other ‘sharp’ utensils in front of her. There were only blunt forks and spoons.

I looked at Seo Dawon and checked his expression, but Seo Dawon was simply listening to Chairwoman Shin with a bland smile.

As expected, there was no trace of awkwardness in his expression. So, to match the mood, I began to cut the meat on my plate and placed it in my mouth.

It was really sweet and soft…I thought I’d get indigestion if I ate more than I could enjoy, so I managed to swallow one bite and then rummaged through the plate in front of me. Some bizarre atmosphere overwhelmed hunger.

“Koo Kyungman was always impudent.” On the other hand, Seo Dawon was on a different level from me, who was simply trying to adapt to the mood.

He responded to the Chairwoman’s remarks from time to time and listened to her with great interest. Even though he didn’t touch the food, he exuded the impression that he was enjoying the dinner.

Chairwoman Shin also seemed to be pleased with Seo Dawon’s attitude; the conversation constantly flowed between them without stopping.

“Just impudence? He was a pig who did not know the kindness that was used to raise him. I should have killed him the moment he stepped foot in my house,” she said.

However, despite such friendly atmosphere, Chairwoman Shin’s hatred was occasionally revealed. Already assured of her own victory, it was clear to see what kind of situation Koo Kyungman would be mired in for the rest of his life.

Fortunately, conversation about Koo Kyungman soon ceased; perhaps she thought it unseemly dinner conversation.

However, the remnants of her unresolved anger began to be redirected towards her son. “Honestly, though that child is one that I birthed through my own pain; I can’t help but think that all he had suffered is through his own foolishness.”

“……”

“We’re not some ordinary family. There’s no use telling him that he’s only become a successor to the business as his father’s only legitimate son– none of that will penetrate his brain.”

“Hui-seo-ssi seems to be a bit romantic.” [3]

“Right. His head is just a flower patch. A flower patch!”

The more I heard Chairwoman Shin’s outspoken displeasure, the more I felt sympathy for Koo Hui-seo.

Her parental behavior was not normal, and accused Koo Hui-seo of being stupid or self-serving for failing to follow along. This mindset will probably not change until the day she dies.

It was not because Koo Hui-seo was stupid that he blindly believed in his brother’s wicked heart. She made it so easy to manipulate Koo Hui-seo such that he was moved by the smallest hint of affection.

In the end, She, who clicked her tongue at her son and called him a fool, was the one who made him that way. The violence his father perpetuated probably contributed as well. All that combined and twisted together to create this result.

“Nothing’s to your taste?” Chairwoman Shin suddenly looked back towards me, interrupting her passionate conversation.

I nodded my head, tired and uncomfortable–ready to leave this place soon. “Yes, I’m sorry. May I be excused first?”

“Okay. I’ll send Seo Dawon up soon as well.”

Seo Dawon did not add anything to Chairwoman Shin's words, but he observed my complexion. Jung Garam, who had not been hiding his disinterest in this conversation and instead had been lounging silently with chin in his palms, also looked at me as well.

Both of them looked as if their gazes were asking, 'Do you want me to come with you?' but I shook my head slightly. I just wanted to lie down alone.

Watching us, Chairwoman Shin gestured with her hand; a polite server, a rather big man, walked in front of me with his head bowed low. "I'll show you to your room."

I walked behind him, out of the bright greenhouse, and realized that the little I had eaten had given me indigestion. I barely made it back to the room and closed the door. When I entered the tidy room, devoid of the smells of food, my stomach calmed a little.

"……"

Of course, that relief didn't mean much after seeing Koo Hui-seo sitting calmly on my bed. I almost shrieked when we made eye contact; my breath became short and my lips moved involuntarily, "……Have you eaten?"

"No. I can hardly eat anymore, now."

I pretended to be calm.

Koo Hui-seo's responding expression was calm as well, but I was incredibly concerned about his solitary presence in my room.

How should I say this–I had a creeping suspicion that he would threaten me menacingly with that peaceful manner of his.

Because of that, I couldn't ask why he was here. I couldn't even ask him to leave. Koo Hui-seo seemed to have perceived my dilemma when he saw me hesitating, as if nailed to the floor in front of the door.

He slowly got off the bed and walked towards me at a glacial pace, as if to convince me he posed no threat. “If I’ve surprised you, I’m sorry. I thought you’d be having a meal, so…This was my room in the past, so I just came in for a moment.”

“Oh……”

He pointed at the wide window by the bed. “I’d often sit on that windowsill and observe the scenery below.”

“……”

“When the curtains are drawn, you can hide your body well.”

I nodded, to show my understanding, but I couldn’t take my eyes off the wrist of his pointing hand. Because, white scars–slash marks–were clearly engraved there.

TL: NGL I’d feel utterly uncomfortable with seeing someone hand feed a rich lady right in front of me.

Also, for those that don’t see the announcements on the discord, I’m on vacation for the next 10 days, so my updates might be a bit sporadic. I’ll still update though 😀

Footnotes

1. , which I translated as wild vegetables, are side dishes that are made from vegetables that were traditionally foraged from the mountains. Common ones are shepherd’s purses or stir-fried fernbrake bracken.

2.

soy sauce marinated crabs.

3. To those that might be confused, romantic, here, means something like idealistic and naive. It harkens back to Don Quixote and the era of searching for “romance.”

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Chapter 92

Chapter 92

My body froze as soon as I saw the scars; Koo Hui-seo seemed to realize the subject of my gaze. He quickly lowered his arm and hid the scar by wrapping his other hand around his wrist, but the awkward atmosphere would not vanish.

I wished I could hide my feelings as easily as Seo Dawon. I looked up, blaming myself for my incompetence. Koo Hui-seo sported an awkward smile.

“Ah, um……” I started.

“……”

“I-I also liked hiding under my desk as a kid.”

“……”

“I’d bring a blanket and lay it on the desk, and…Haah….”

“I see.”

I babbled, bothered by the short silence, and Koo Hui-seo matched my words, half a beat late. He seemed more comfortable now that he understood my good intentions.

I felt relieved, looking at that expression, but I was soon hit by reality.

A lunatic, who would impregnate his half-brother for revenge, came into my room…Why am I trying to sympathize with a man like that?

When I saw the remnants of self-inflicted stab wounds on his wrist, I was actually more flustered than pitying…I felt sorry for Koo Hui-seo, who seemed embarrassed

However, when Koo Huiseo relaxed his expression, parted his tense lips, and laughed awkwardly, my rolling insides calmed down a little.

Eventually, I recommended that he take a seat at the table in this room that he didn't seem to like. He didn't reject me, as I had expected, and instead obeyed my suggestion.

After sitting silently for a while, Koo Hui-seo spoke first, "Seeing how you left first, you must have felt a bit uncomfortable at the dinner table…"

"Ah, of course not." I quickly shook my hands, gesturing no, but he didn't seem to believe me.

Did my face betray me again? However, instead of pressing me, Koo Hui-seo brought up Chairwoman Shin. "Not only Lee-kyung-nim, but a lot of people…find mother a bit uncomfortable."

"What?"

"Mother was a famous shaman before she became a User." He said, cautiously, as if he was apologizing on behalf of his mother. According to him, she made others uncomfortable because she could see and hear things that others couldn't.

'Was that why she could see Seo Dawon and Jung Garam?'

I was curious about her ability, so I stopped denying my discomfort and looked at Koo Hui-seo. He calmly continued to speak, "She would often say I was haunted by many ghosts; when I was younger, she would make me crossdress as well… [1] She doesn't hesitate to act strangely as well. She says she'll go crazy if she doesn't act the way she does. Rather than my

mother’s true intentions, I think it’s more influenced by the ghosts that she is carrying within her…”

Koo Hui-seo made excuses for Chairwoman Shin’s circumstances like an obedient son. The more I heard, the more depressed I became.

Chairwoman Shin’s unusual background exists, yes, but I could feel Koo Hui-seo’s desperation, repeating to himself that it wasn’t his mother’s true intent but the ghost that she serves, in regards to his mother’s mistreatment of her son. His mental victory over logic.

Back when he was imprisoned in the hospital ward, Koo Hui-seo had told us that ‘all the other past personalities have died and he was the only ego to endure and remain in the end.’ But, in a sense, he may still not have escaped from the past at all?

Eventually, I cut him off and blurted, “If I was Chairwoman Shin, I would have let you know in advance.”

“What?”

“About the ghosts–that I may speak sharply at times because of them. I would have asked for your understanding in advance.”

“……”

“Also, I don’t mean to contradict Hui-seo-ssi and your words, but…I don’t think Chairwoman Shin is afraid of being misunderstood.”

My words were euphemistic, but Koo Hui-seo seemed to understand what I was trying to say. He looked as if he had received a blow; a moment later, he asked, in a hoarse voice, “By any chance, did mother talk about me?”

“……” I didn’t say anything, but my silence was answer enough.

He lowered his head, “You may think I’m stupid, but…”

“……”

“When I returned home and said I would kill Kyungman-ie…Mother praised me. It was the first praise I’ve ever received from her in all my life.”

“……”

“In the past, she would ignore me as if I didn’t exist, but now she acknowledges me as her son. That’s…That made me so happy…”

“…….”

“This is…definitely weird, right?”

Back when he was imprisoned in the hospital ward, Koo Hui-seo loathed his mother as much as Koo Kyungman.

However, after returning to the mansion and experiencing what it was like for his mother to acknowledge him as a son and treat him like a human being, he began to act like Koo Hui-seo from the past. His vigilance against his mother had begun to fade.

I began to think that there must be some reasons for the circumstances between old Koo Hui-seo and his mother’s relationship. It hasn’t been more than a few days, and he’s already falling into old habits.

While confessing his story, Koo Hui-seo became more agitated and spoke faster with every excuse. By the time he finished, his expression was horribly contorted. “…It still feels like I’m trapped back at the hospital.”

His face was of a man who had lost his way.

So, even though I was hesitant, I reached out to him.

I may be acting this way because of his tearful expression. I grasped his cold and emaciated hand that was lying on the table; his back trembled vulnerably.

Koo Hui-seo tried to pull out his hand, but I put some strength into my grip. It was even more heartbreaking to see his awkward attempts at pulling away. Obviously, he had never been comforted this way before.

“Honestly, I think Hui-seo-ssi is a bit of a strange person….”

“…….”

Of course, I wanted to bite my tongue as soon as I started–I was just an ordinary human being who had no skills in comforting others. I didn’t mean to be this honest…

However, Koo Hui-seo looked at me calmly, as if he was expecting something more. I felt the thoughts in my head getting tangled, but I continued to speak, “But, even so…It seems like Hui-seo-ssi knows that about himself…”

“…….”

“S-so, didn’t he, somehow…Didn’t you want to live a good, ordinary life?”

“……”

“You wanted to get along with your mother; you wanted to get along with your younger brother…That’s all you wanted.”

I really didn’t have the gift for consolation.

Doesn’t Koo Hui-seo know by now that I’m simply rambling? He was still staring at me, incredibly patient.

Unable to overcome the pressure of that gaze, I ended up rambling out the central core of what I had wanted to say, “What I meant to say is…Hui-seo wants to do well, but the people around him don’t accept him, right? But, the world is vast…”

“……”

“And there are many people out there…If you search, there’s bound to be people who accept Hui-seo-ssi as he is…”

“……”

“And it doesn’t have to be your family. Or, you could create your own family later on…Don’t you think?”

Honestly, I wanted to curse Chairwoman Shin, Koo Hui-seo’s mother…

But I’m an unrelated third party and Koo Hui-seo still had lingering feelings for her. Besides, I thought he would tear up more if I touched more on the original personality’s situation with his family. Though, now that it’s all said and done, I don’t know if my feelings were conveyed properly.

And, to be honest, I don’t really know what exactly I’ve said, so I thought he probably wouldn’t understand either…

It was then.

Koo Hui-seo, whose hand was sitting calmly in my grasp, suddenly turned his palm upwards and grasped mine.

“Ah!” His grip was incredibly strong, so I screamed, worried that he would crush my hand. After listening to my scream, Koo Hui-seo relaxed his hold, but he still held me with enough force, stopping me from escaping his grasp.

TL: MC is good kid too empathetic for this ranker world. And obliviously good at saying the things to make people latch onto him.

Footnotes

1. There’s a superstition in east asian countries that a young boy should crossdress as a woman to confuse the evil spirits and hide from curses.

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Chapter 93

Chapter 93

Of course fear penetrated me.

If I was being honest, I was far too careless. No matter how insignificant a User I may be, I thought I would somehow be able to resist an emaciated Koo Hui-seo…

‘What on earth is with this grip? I guess insane people truly are strong…!’ I was at my wit’s end with this predicament.

However, it occurred to me–logic piercing through my fear–that I shouldn’t show signs of being intimidated. I, after quickly stiffening my face and deliberately straightening my shoulders, spoke in a determined tone, “Why…are you holding my hand? Please let go.”

“You held onto me first…”

“That’s just…That was a consolatory gesture. I didn’t mean to grab at your hands like that.”

“…..”

Koo Hui-seo must have been self-conscious at my reply; he rolled his eyes here and there for a while. Then, he slowly released the strength on the chokehold his fingers had on my wrist. Careful not to provoke him, I slowly pulled back my hand.

The disappointed eyes that followed my movement raised goosebumps along my arm, but I was able to calm down after hiding my trembling hands under the table.

As soon as I settled myself, I thought I should get Koo Hui-seo out of this room as soon as possible. I was going to say that I wanted to rest alone…but Koo Hui-seo was faster. “Have I frightened you?”

I couldn’t bring myself to nod at his quietly choked voice.

That wasn’t the only thing. While I was hesitating, he bowed his head deeply. “I’m sorry,” he apologized, even though he didn’t seem to know why I was scared.

My heart ached when I received Koo Hui-seo’s apology. He must be at least ten years older than me…But, strangely enough, he felt like a child. It felt like receiving an apology from a child.

Haah…

Eventually, I swallowed back a deep sigh that bubbled up from within. I admonished, “Well, you don’t have to apologize for every single thing…I was just a bit uncomfortable.”

“Why……?”

“Usually, two men don’t paw at each other’s hand. It’s a bit… embarrassing?”

Koo Hui-seo raised his head to show that he was listening; after a short silence, he suddenly asked, “Do you hate me now?”

I had expected this turn of the conversation. Once again, he was slightly off the mark. I scratched my head in frustration.

Maybe I shouldn’t have tried to comfort him? With that rubbish thought in the back of my mind, I said firmly, “It’s neither like nor dislike. I have no particular feelings for Koo Hui-seo-ssi.”

"……"

"It's just…Honestly, even if it weren't me, anyone would have sympathized with Hui-seo-ssi's story if they heard it. My attempt to comfort you, earlier, was an extension of that. I'm sorry."

At my apology, Koo Hui-seo stared at me with eyes glistening like glass marbles.

I thought he would get angry; it's the first time I've ever spoken so unsympathetically to someone. Unexpectedly, Koo Hui-seo smiled instead of shouting or flaring his temper.

That smile, oddly, seemed pleased.

"You felt sorry for me…" He murmured to himself.

"……."

However, there was still an inexplicable smile that graced his lips. I kept my vigilance, not answering; Koo Hui-seo leaned his body towards me. Involuntarily, my upper body retreated backwards.

Koo Hui-seo did not point that out. "Lee-kyung-ssi is afraid of me, right? Whenever we lock eyes, you're always blinking and shocked."

"No, I…"

"If not scared, then are you disgusted with me?"

He cut to another fundamental issue with our conversation; I missed the timing to deny him. This time, Koo Hui-seo audibly laughed.

I shook my head, a beat late, and tried to think of any excuse. However, he waved his hand, trying to reassure me. "It's fine. I also don't think I'm quite normal…"

"……."

His hand crept closer to me over the table; the table was far too small for me to widen the gap between us. Eventually, his fingertips were right in front of me. Though he was moving slowly, it felt like his hands were rushing towards me–a visceral pressure.

I felt like I couldn't do anything. I was worried that I might further provoke Koo Hui-seo if I were to dodge my hands…

"What's this bullshit?"

A familiar voice.

At the same time, I felt my body leaning far backwards. It seems that my chair was moved, body and all.

The back of my head hit something solid.

'Jung Garam!' I looked back in delight.

Jung Garam glared at Koo Hui-seo before turning to me, "Why's he reaching out to you?"

"……" However, I had no choice but to keep my lips tightly shut. How could I explain the situation to Jung Garam in front of Koo Hui-seo…? Since I couldn't speak to Treasure Hunter, I just looked at him earnestly.

Jung Garam searched my gaze and clicked his tongue, understanding my plea. "I guess I've arrived just in time?"

"……"

"Why do you always attract all the perverts?"

He talked as if it were all my fault, but Jung Garam, after saying all that–waved his hand at Koo Hui-seo, who was still observing us. Something flashed by, at such an incredibly fast speed that my eyes could not follow. I was startled at a sudden popping sound.

I looked at Koo Hui-seo with surprised eyes; there was a long horizontal wound on his originally unmarred cheek. He seemed to have been cut by something.

Koo Hui-seo, almost instinctively, retrieved his outstretched hand and placed it by his cheek. The cut, which looked like a small scrape at first, opened as soon as he touched it, quickly spilling enough blood to soak his palm.

“A spanking is the best medicine for crazy guys like him.” Jung Garam crossed his arms, assailing him with a powerful threat.

Jung Garam, this kid! He doesn’t know how to do things in moderation. What if you leave a big scar on his face?! Chairwoman Shin was downstairs, and I was unable to summon Jung Garam right now. Moreover, we had no idea how strong Koo Hui-seo’s abilities were.

Disregarding my nerves, Jung Garam showed nothing but a triumphant attitude.

Ah…I’m screwed.

Koo Hui-seo does not know of Jeong Garam’s existence, so, from his perspective, it will look like I attacked him.

However, once again, Koo Hui-seo smiled instead of getting angry or calling his mother. “…Alright. Let’s continue to talk later.”

He took his hand off his cheek and said his goodbyes. Apparently, the wound, which had opened quite wide, had healed completely within this short moment.

After that, Koo Hui-seo slowly stood up and passed by us. I held my breath and only sighed once I heard the door closing behind my back.

“Haaah….” I sighed.

“What happened?” Jung Garam suddenly asked, grabbing me by the nape of the neck, before I could feebly collapse. I didn’t even know where

to begin; the words would not fall easily from my lips.

To summarize what had happened in this room: [While explaining Chairwoman Shin's backstory, he fell into an awful state of despair. I felt sorry and sympathized with his pitiful image, so I offered some words of comfort. But, that action may have somehow stimulated that crazy guy…]

No matter how you present it, I wouldn't be able to avoid Jung Garam's bitter criticism that this trouble was of my own making.

I tried to think of a plausible excuse. However, this time the Servant's unexpected ability, which I had forgotten about for a while, seemed to have activated faithfully.

Jung Garam looked down at my squirming body as the silence continued. The corners of his lips contorted, "You know, I've already heard everything?"

"Huh?"

"'Hui-seo-ssi is strange but blah blah blah…' How very sweet?"

Damn it…!

I must be out of my mind. I forgot that servants could hear everything, no matter how quiety I whisper to myself, as if I had been bugged!

Wait a minute…So he's saying he knows everything?

I got angry at Jung Garam's sarcastic tone. "Then, why did you ask me if you already knew everything, hm?"

"I wanted to know what went through your dumb mind when you said that." Jung Garam grabbed my chin–I was still sitting in that chair–and forced my head up. Though they were a few thin and elegant fingers, I did not dare resist that noticeably different force.

He leaned his face close to mine and spoke in an almost threatening tone. "A person in your position sympathizing with Koo Hui-seo? Don't

make me laugh…What do you think might have happened if I didn't arrive just then? How long do you think it would take him to twist your neck?"

"You don't know how insignificant and foolish you are. And how do you, in every situation, choose to do the things that will worry both me and Dawon-hyung…" After saying so, Jung Garam clasped my neck with his other hand.

I thought he was going to grab me by the collar, but, instead, his cold hands slowly stroked the vessels along the side of my neck.

I couldn't muster up the energy to rebel–overwhelmed by the pressure along my airway and the grim expression the Treasure Hunter wore.

Shaking, I simply let him do as he wished; Jung Garam sighed deeply.

Then, he leaned his forehead against my neck, rubbing into me: he was acting like a child. Detestably changing the tone of his voice, he whined, "Choi Lee-kyung. Why do you feel bad for Koo Hui-seo? From now on, he'll be the guildmaster of the guild with the most cash flow–and a Ranker to boot. If his younger brother messes with him, his mother will solve everything for him. He's better off than you no matter how you look at it."

"……"

"If you're going to pity someone, pity me. I'm already dead. Additionally, I've been contracted to a small fry like you."

"……."

"You're still renting your lodgings, your level is low, your abilities are shabby, and, most of all, I'm afraid you'll die with any errant blow. As your contractee, every day my heart pounds with anxiety…I feel like I'm going to develop a mental illness because of you?"

What could I say to argue with that?

I could only swallow my pent-up frustration and respond, "I understand…Nothing happened, it's fine…"

TL: I’m still on vacation so I’m a bit slow to upload~ but here’s 93!

MC finally said to someone “I have no feelings for you” lmao.

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Chapter 94

Chapter 94

CW: Torture?

Jung Garam did not remove his forehead–still rubbing against my neck–until he heard my answer.

However, his hands were still clasped around my neck, twitching as if they were on the verge of clamping down with his unexpected strength. Of course, I wanted to brush off that uncomfortable hand, but I found that I couldn't resist. I was frozen from his unfamiliar expression–a sincere expression that held none of his usual cynical mockeries.

"It's totally fluttering."

"…W-what are you talking about…"

Jung Garam murmured as if he cut straight through my core and were observing my heart. His tone gave me goosebumps; swallowing my saliva, I could barely respond.

It was then. The door opened, as if we were characters in a script.

It was Seo Dawon.

Seo Dawon saw Jung Garam holding my neck and how I struggled against him; he closed the door and strode close to us.

And, thankfully, he stopped the younger ghost. He directly took the treasure hunter's hand off my neck and stepped in between us, widening the distance between me and Jung Garam. "Why are you harassing Lee-kyung-ie like that?"

"When did I do that?"

"There's no way you missed how scared he was?" Though he said that, Seo Dawon did not act forcefully besides removing Jung Garam's hands.

So, Jung Garam relaxed his rigid expression and retreated. He glanced at me, "He's the one with an overactive imagination, what am I supposed to do…."

I got angry at his words and glared at Jung Garam timidly, but Seo Dawon stepped in before we could quarrel more. "Koo Kyungman will wake soon."

That meant that the time for us to confirm the hour of Koo Kyungman's destruction would soon befall us. The vague anxiety that something might go wrong crossed my mind, but I chose to not voice that worry.

Moreover, it was surprising to see that neither Jung Garam nor Seo Dawon looked particularly happy. Jung Garam seemed indifferent, and Seo Dawon only had a light, bland smile on his face.

"If you're ready, let's go."

"Alright."

However, I couldn't exactly ask 'Why aren't you pleased?' so I nodded quietly at Seo Dawon's words. I got up from my seat; Jung Garam was already standing at the door, staring back at me.

When I opened the door, one of the servants who was serving food behind Chairwoman Shin, stood, bowing his head. They were probably waiting in advance. [1]

“You may go up these stairs.” He quietly backed away after guiding us to some stairs hidden at the end of the corridor–separate from the central stairway that originally took us to this floor.

Seo Dawon nodded to Jung Garam, and Jeong Garam went on ahead. Seo Dawon and I followed afterwards.

* * *

On top of the stairs stood an iron door, painted black.

The wall next to the door was studded with jewel-like blue crystals; as we climbed up, the color of the blue crystals turned transparent. The iron door opened automatically with a clunking sound. I carefully stepped through.

The room’s insides looked a bit like a shaman’s shrine. In every corner that could be seen, there was a Buddha statue entangled in red ties; large and small talismans littered the wallpaper, creating an eerie atmosphere. [2]

“You–“

“Hnngh!”

Looking around, blinded by the enormous interior, I almost fell, surprised by the touch of something soft at my feet–a white furball, Chairwoman Shin’s cat familiar.

Fortunately, Seo Dawon, who was behind me, caught me so I did not fall, but my face flushed red after making eye contact with Chairwoman Shin, who was sitting in front of us.

Chairwoman Shin usually has a strict and perfectly professional face, but just then she looked at me as if she saw someone lacking. Jung Garam snorted.

“H-hello,” I said.

“…….”

Although I was embarrassed, I pretended not to, as much as possible, and approached her. Maybe she still thought of me as simple-minded, she just called the cat that surprised me and petted it in lieu of returning the greeting.

The blatant disregard made me feel a bit awkward, but I’d rather not start anything. So, I stood in front of her without further catching her eye. Soon enough, Koo Hui-seo appeared on the other side of the door that we entered through.

“Kyungman-ie woke up.” Koo Hui-seo paused, looking at me next to his mother, before bowing his head politely at her, as if he were a servant reporting to his mistress.

Chairwoman Shin rose up out of her seat without saying a word; I stared at Seo Dawon. He nodded, reassuring me, and walked first; I followed behind the two into another room.

“Mph!! Mmmph!!!”

Inside that other room was a large bed; laying on top was Koo Kyungman, limbs bound to all 4 posts of the bed.

It was similar to how Koo Hui-seo had previously tied him up with black ties; but, unlike before, Koo Kyungman was not wearing a blindfold, allowing us to clearly look into his bloodshot eyes.

Koo Kyungman struggled, as if he were having a seizure; he must have predicted to some extent what would happen to him. And Chairwoman Shin, who usually carried herself with a slight frown, smiled as if she were watching something amusing. “Really, this is truly refreshing–taking care of one more worry before I die.”

“……”

“Mmmmppph!!!”

Though I could not grasp the emotions of everyone else here, Chairwoman Shin and Koo Kyungman were clearly broadcasting their feelings. Koo Kyungman expressed himself through his muzzled mouth, like an animal, and Chairwoman Shin observed him joyfully.

And I…My mouth felt dry as I watched his bloodshot eyes and his struggling, to the point of bruising, limbs.

To be honest, the courage to see Koo Kyungman’s two arms being cut off was fading. It’s not that I was ignorant of his actions, nor that I sympathized with him.

It’s just–maybe it’s that I was afraid of harming a living human being full of vitality. There was no answer for this feeling of weakness I felt within. Regretfully, as the barely eaten dinner began queasily moving, my stomach began to ache.

I didn’t want to be caught trembling, so I clasped my hands tightly behind my back.

However, Jung Garam had already seen me, after tearing his attention away from Koo Kyungman, and Seo Dawon held my hands lightly. It seems that I was being rather obvious.

In addition to holding my hands, Seo Dawon whispered into my ears, “Close your eyes.”

However, I could not readily accept his consideration. I was concerned by the gazes of Chairwoman Shin and Koo Hui-seo…Furthermore, Seo Dawon, Jung Garam, and I were on the same team–the same boat.

“I can’t always be one step behind every time,” I said. I, in the process of achieving their revenge, couldn’t always stay back because I was afraid.

So, steeling my resolve, I turned my gaze towards Koo Kyungman, who was still struggling wildly. Seo Dawon, seeing how I firmly made up my

mind, moved to take his hands of mine…but I, involuntarily, clung on.

I was embarrassed to hear Seo Dawon's quiet chuckles in the back, but I, who needed some support, shamelessly gripped harder. Seo Dawon calmly let himself be caught.

"……Shall we start?"

"Hmmm…Alright. There's no need to drag this out."

Koo Hui-seo, as if was watching over me, fortuitously asked Chairwoman Shin to start only after I raised my head high. She nodded in return.

"Mmmph!! Mm! Mm!"

The black strands that held Koo Kyungman's limbs aloft climbed up his arms like a living snake and settled around his upper elbow.

Then it began to tighten in a circular shape, like a string cutter. At first, Koo Kyungman stopped shouting–perhaps ignorant of what was truly happening–and stared warily. Then, feeling that something was wrong, he began swinging his arms wildly.

"Mmmph!!! Mm!!"

However, the black strands did not stop tightening. The skin under the string had already turned red and swollen; Koo Kyungman began pounding his head against the wall, neck swinging here and there–the only thing he could control–as the string penetrated his skin.

The strands surrounding his arms did not loosen. Meanwhile, dozens of similar black strands climbed up onto the bed, raising its metaphorical head, and began surrounding him.

At that time, Koo Hui-seo approached the bed with a flask of blue liquid in his hand. When he sat on the mattress, the string tightening around the captive's arms stopped moving.

Koo Kyungman stared up at his approaching brother; when Koo Hui-seo took off the saliva-covered muzzle, he breathed hard.

Koo Hui-seo shoved the flask right underneath his brother's nose, "I'll divide its content into three–slowly swallow. If you spit it out, I'll cut your arms off without it."

"……"

Koo Kyungman's cold and sweaty face was full of vigilance, but he also seemed to realize that there was nothing much he could do. Before long, he opened his mouth very slightly, and Koo Hui-seo poured a certain amount from the flask before stopping.

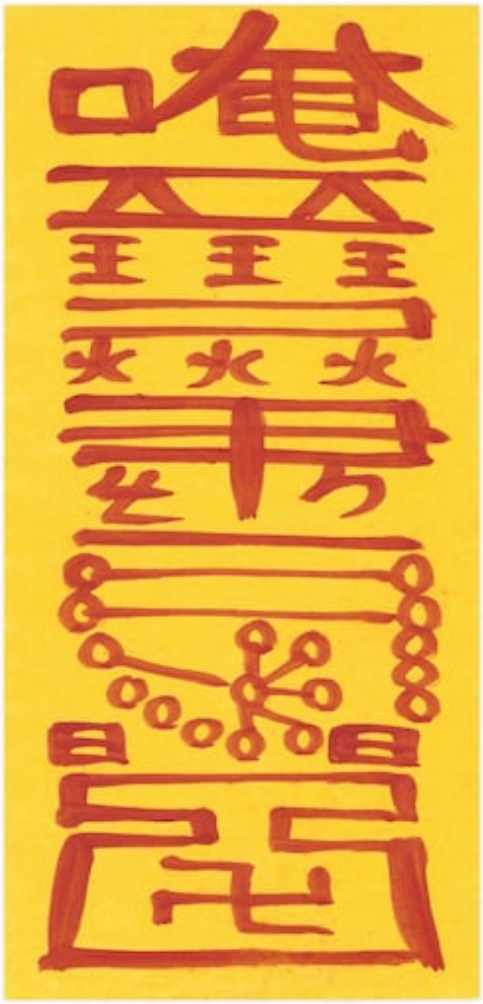
Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Quick update. I really do pity Koo Kyungman.

Chapter 100 is coming up soon and I'm trying to think of something do~

Footnotes

1. They, here, I'm using as the gender neutral pronoun



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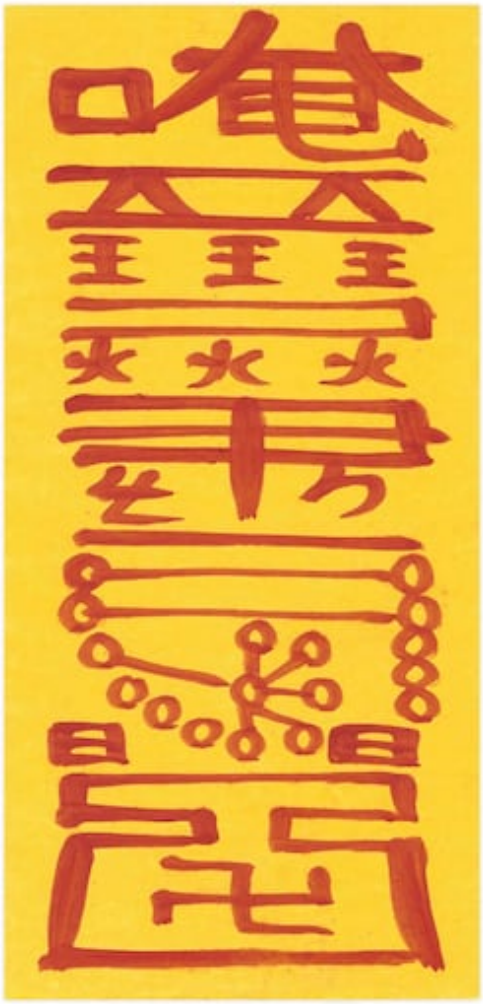

Bujeok talisman.

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Chapter 95

Chapter 95

Cw: Torture

Koo Kyungman gulped down all of the mysterious liquid. Koo Hui-seo did not stop there; when his brother opened his mouth once again, Hui-seo inserted his fingers inside to see if he was hiding anything in his mouth.

“Cough, Cough…!”

The sight of his fingers touching the root of his tongue made me feel nauseous. Koo Hui-seo, as expected, simply overpowered the other. After checking and muzzling the captive, he stood up without hesitation.

“Mmmmph!!”

When Koo Hui-seo completely turned away from him, we could see that the ‘something’ that Koo Kyungman drank was working.

He began to twist and turn with an incomparable intensity than before; Koo Hui-seo’s black strands held him from all directions, but, nevertheless, he shook hard enough for the bed to rattle violently.

“Knnngrhh!!” A single gruesome scream pierced through the air. Simultaneously, Koo Kyungman’s stomach suddenly swelled up.

It was like a balloon laying dormant had inflated with air all at once. After Koo Kyungman looked at his bloated stomach with bloodshot/wide-eyed eyes, his head leaned back, eyes upturned, as if he were going to faint.

However, Koo Hui-seo manipulated the black strands and hit his brother hard on the cheeks, preventing him from losing consciousness.

“Cough……” In the end, Koo Kyungman opened his eyes with a terribly pained expression. Meanwhile, the sound of several ribs breaking filled the room.

I saw him shaking his limbs, bloody bubbles frothing around his mouth, and lowered my gaze.

Even though I was doing no more than being an observer, this was my limit. I started to feel nauseous.

“Kyungman-ie will stay in this state for 10 months.”

“……”

“Nothing will be done to alleviate the pain, nor will he be reprieved in unconsciousness.”

To be in such clearly observable pain for 10 months without sleep…It’s torture enough not to be allowed to sleep for 10 months; it would be truly horrible to add that to Koo Kyungman’s current condition.

However, Chairwoman Shin nodded and smiled at Koo Hui-seo’s words. She looked absolutely satisfied. “Yes, that’s how it should be. It’s far too merciful to end him right now.”

“Of course, after pregnancy, we should allow a certain amount of slumber to stabilize the fetus.”

“Nngh….” Koo Kyungman, forced to consciousness, clearly heard his brother’s words. He stared at his swollen stomach with a pale face and screamed through his muzzle. “Nnngh! Mmmmpph!!”

I couldn’t even look in the direction of the desperate screams for fear of making eye contact with the man.

However, Chairwoman Shin was different.

Perhaps she wasn't satisfied with watching from afar. She passed her son and approached the bed where Koo Kyungman was tied. Koo Kyungman, in turn, stopped screaming and shrank back, wary of the Witch.

The cat in her arms seemed to boost his fear. She lowered the cat from her embrace and personally struck at the captive.

Koo Kyungman's face flung to the side as the sound of the slap rang out into the air. She laughed despicably at how he was unable to resist her. "You still dare look me in the eyes at this moment…!"

"……"

"You've been talking behind my back, calling me a toothless tiger, haven't you? What do you think now? Am I still a powerless elder locked in a back room?" [1] Chairwoman Shin raised her hand again, about to deliver another strike.

At that moment, Koo Hui-seo approached her from behind.

I had definitely thought he approached her to stop her. To be honest, Koo Kyungman was in such a state that I wouldn't have been surprised if he died from another unfortunate blow, and Chairwoman Shin seemed very excited.

I could feel how much she detested the other just from the gleam of her eyes; Koo Hui-seo needed to calm down his mother for the sake of their future plans.

"….!"

However, what happened afterwards far exceeded my imagination. After approaching his Mother, Koo Hui-seo wrapped black strands around her neck at almost invisible speeds.

"Cough!"

He then grabbed the strands at both ends and twisted it. Chairwoman Shin dropped to the ground before she could even shriek–her neck had been

broken.

“W-What….!” I gasped.

“Lee-kyung-ah, get back.”

As soon as I shouted in dismay, Seo Dawon and Jung Garam popped in front of me, as if to protect me.

The familiar, like me, seemed to grasp the situation belatedly. It remained rigid until it saw Koo Hui-seo hugging Chairwoman Shin’s collapsing body, rushing at him.

However, Koo Hui-seo, still holding his mother’s corpse, easily avoided the familiar by retreating a few steps.

[Ah—-.] The familiar, knowing that it would soon breathe its last, stared at its mistress before collapsing as well.

The familiar, after falling to the floor, hardened as if it were affected by rigor mortis. Soon enough, the body, starting with the tip of its tail, began to crumble into gray ashes.

Koo Hui-seo peacefully laid Chairwoman Shin’s body on the floor after the familiar disappeared. He then stood up, looking at me with a casual expression as if he had done nothing particularly significant. “After talking with Lee-kyung-ssi yesterday, I had a lot of thoughts. How I should live in the future and so on… And, I gained a bit of courage.” Koo Hui-seo gave an embarrassed smile.

He seemed to be saying that I gave him the push to do what he did today. Of course, I couldn’t understand his thought process–I felt like I was going crazy.

Just when did I tell him to kill his own family?! I only said that his family seemed to be plagued with issues and that he shouldn’t feel beholden to familial ties.

Of course, what Chairwoman Shin did to her son was horrifying abuse, but that was between the two of them. I had no intention of inserting myself into their problem.

However, Koo Hui-seo's ambiguous words made me reflect back on our conversation. Even Seo Dawon and Jung Garam stared back at me with a queer look…Eventually, I had no choice but to plead my innocence. "What are you saying! I never told you to kill Chairwoman Shin!"

"Ah, of course you never said that. It's just…Lee-kyung-ssi inspired me greatly."

Inspiration? Did I send him some subliminal message to kill his family without even realizing it?

However, Koo Hui-seo continued to talk, paying no attention to my flabbergasted expression. "If it wasn't for Lee-kyung-ssi, it would have taken a much longer time for me to work up the courage for this. Or I may not have done it at all."

"……"

"Thank you, from the bottom of my heart." Koo Hui-seo said, with a bright smile that I had never seen before on his face.

That expression…it's exactly like if a crazy guy became even crazier, and his brain was replaced with flowerbeds. That person would make an expression just like that.

According to his words, he's been meaning to kill her for a long time and wasn't able to pull the trigger until our earlier conversation? I stepped back–I had a hunch that further conversation would not result in meaningful communication.

However, Koo Hui-seo did not seem to care about my wariness and continued in a cheerful tone, "Also, I thought that this was the best timing for mother to neatly disappear."

"……Why do you say that?"

"I'm going to announce that Kyungman-ie killed mother and is currently on the run. I'm sure all the guild executives were aware of the invisible hostilities between the two…Wouldn't it be more convincing for him to run away after committing murder than to disappear for no reason?" He insisted that he didn't 'kill on impulse,' and stared at me, eagerly awaiting my reaction.

I, on the other hand, stood in place with arms crossed, showing little of what I was truly feeling externally.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL : Eldritch Horror strikes again. I sympathize with MC tbh; It's too much work to deal with far-gone yanderes.

Footnotes

1. Essentially referring to families that prefer to lock their elders in the inner sanctums of the house, rendering them powerless and docile.

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Chapter 96

Chapter 96

“That isn’t a bad idea…” Jung Garam stroked his chin, murmuring to himself.

Anyway, it did not occur to me that Koo Hui-seo had meticulously thought the act of murder through. That didn’t matter though–the way he looked at me was a little uncomfortable.

How should I say this…it seemed like he was bragging to me. Koo Hui-seo continued to look obsessively at my expression, as if he had shown me a film he personally directed, anticipating for me to sweetly praise him.

He stared at me like a fan who came to a concert–it felt suffocating. /I started to think about him saying that I created the right timing- that it was my fault he killed Chairwoman Shin…

I couldn’t tell if this was my paranoia or if he was just overly psychotic. In the end, all I could do was to betray Koo Hui-seo’s expectations and keep my mouth shut.

“It sounds like he just concocted some excuse after killing her.” Fortunately, Seo Dawon quick-wittedly pinpointed the displeasure I felt. I almost forgot about Koo Hui-seo and shouted ‘Right?!’ at the Mage.

“Hmmm….” Seo Dawon tapped his chin, looking as if he had formed a headache from Koo Hui-seo’s actions. “First things first, let’s cut off Koo Kyungman’s arms. Then, we’ll have little reason to squabble with Koo Hui-seo anymore.”

"……."

"Don't be so nervous. Chairwoman Shin's death is not such a bad thing for us."

I blinked at Seo Dawon to convey that I understood him. After readying my heart, I turned back towards Koo Hui-seo once more, locking gazes with his sparkling eyes.

I opened my mouth with great effort, "….First, Let's finish with Koo Kyungman."

"Ahhh……" Koo Hui-seo stretched his shoulders, a little tired, but his strings were different. They still tied the panting and groaning Koo Kyungman to the bed posts without losing tension. I could only watch as the strings tightened before lowering my gaze.

"……!"

As soon as I looked down, my ears felt deafened–as if the surrounding sounds had been muffled–and the smell of blood tickled at my nose.

I had no idea when Seo Dawon approached, but he gripped my shoulder tightly with his hand. When his fingers fell from my body, I was able to hear the surroundings again. Maybe Seo Dawon prevented me from hearing the terrible sound of his arm being torn off.

"Don't look up." The Mage said.

"……"

Seo Dawon warned me not to check Koo Kyungman's current condition.

I felt a little ashamed that my weakness was once again exposed, but I continued to bow my head, following his words.

A few minutes later, Koo Hui-seo asked cautiously, "Mm…What should I do about 'this'?"

…He’s probably talking about Koo Kyungman’s arms, right? I thought about sarcastically telling him to wrap it and package it as a gift, but eventually swallowed such remarks with a sigh. “…Please, do as you wish with it.”

“Alright.”

The slithering noises of the black strands moving through the carpet tickled at my ears. Koo Kyungman’s soft sobs accompanied every movement; however, that, too, slowly faded away.

After the captive quieted down, I raised my head, knowing that I would regret it.

Fortunately, I couldn’t see the empty arm sockets; a blanket had already covered his body. Of course, even with the blanket covering him, I could see the silhouette–the roundness from the swollen stomach and the gaps where the arms should have been. It was just that, though.

‘Haaah….’ I released a relieved sigh because I was imagining something far worse.

As soon as I looked at Koo Kyungman, new system messages began raining down like a waterfall in front of my eyes.

⋆·✦·⋆

Your level has significantly risen from successfully soothing a Servant’s grudge.

A new class skill has been unlocked

Your level of understanding of the necromancer job has significantly increased, shifting your job from ‘junior’ Necromancer to ‘Intermediate Necromancer.’ (Special Transformation)

The Scenario is taking notice of your rapid growth.

For succeeding at revenge far beyond the current capabilities, the Necromancer's abilities have been greatly improved.

.
.

You have won the title 'Sweeter than Candy' by satisfying certain conditions.

And, after clearing the outpour of system messages, the level-up alerts began to fill my view.

Name: Choi Lee-kyung – Lv 80
Class: Intermediate Necromancer

HP – 221,432
MP – 81,000

Title:

Sweeter than Candy – Revenge truly is sweet.

< The title, 'Sweeter than Candy' can only be obtained by users who, in the pursuit of revenge, inflict irreparable damage on their target without suffering retaliation or damage in return. While using this title, the title's special skill, 'Counter Attack' may activate– doubling the damage from an enemy's physical or magic attack and returning it back at the opponent.>

Greenhorn Adventurer – You've tasted the bitterness of life!

<While using the title ‘Greenhorn Adventurer’, movement speed will increase by 5%>

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):

Magic: 680
Magic control: 3.9%
Movement Speed: 22.7% (+5%)

Skill
– Summon evil spirits

[Summon vengeful ghosts: Proficiency 75%, Rank: Mid-High Rank]
[Summon sacrificial offering: Proficiency 0.7%, Rank: Lowest Rank]

.

.

– Death Mark

After special conditions are met, you can attach a death mark to the enemy. A living enemy marked by death will suffer a significant loss in defense; furthermore, you can gain additional experience.

– Shinigami’s book (new!) [1]

You can summon a soul within one hour after their death and look into the soul’s memories.

What an amazing increase in stats. In particular, my heart began to beat at the newly acquired title.

The existing title, ‘Greenhorn Adventurer,’ was given to all first-time Users that entered their first dungeon; it had nothing to do with individual achievements or ability. ‘Sweeter Than Candy’ was a rare title that had a skill (‘Counter Attack’) attached to it.

Plus, if you're attacked (although there's only a chance that it might happen) the attack will be doubled and returned to the enemy…I had to read the title and its descriptions around ten more times before I could ground myself back in reality.

"His level can rise from achieving revenge alone…We should consider this method moving forward."

"Hyung, who are we calling out this time?"

Of course, Seo Dawon and Jung Garam didn't sit still while I was gaping my mouth at the title. They had already manifested my status window and checked over the details. Thanks to the increase in level, the level requirement for summoning another Red Lotus guild member was reached.

The new class skill's description was short and vague, but surely this skill would be useful later? I raised my head; the stress that had been piling up from Koo Kyungman's fate had just flown away.

"……."

"……"

Then, I made eye contact with Koo Hui-seo, who was still looking at me with an excited anticipatory face.

Ah, that's right, he's still there…

Koo Hui-seo continued to stare as I hurried to regain my composure. He didn't say anything, but he must have been observing me while I was preoccupied with the system messages.

His uneasy gaze leered uncomfortably; his brows crumpled. In addition, I was concerned about the black strands that started to slither over and cover Chairwoman Shin's corpse. 'What on earth is he doing….'

Head to toe. Chairwoman shin was wrapped meticulously like a mummy, and she vanished underneath the bed that Koo Kyungman laid on.

Looking closer, the strands that were tying the prisoner were also connected to something in the shadows under the bed. So, I was incredibly ill at ease about what was hidden in the dark.

I knew that Koo Hui-seo could freely control those strings, but, looking at how Chairwoman Shin disappeared, as if she had been sucked underneath the bed, those strands felt like a separate entity from Koo Hui-seo. Like a monster lurking under the bed.

“Please don’t be scared, Lee-kyung-ssi.” Koo Hui-seo, shrewdly reading my expression, broke the silence and spoke in a soothing tone. Of course, I didn’t reply. When my wary eyes did not waver in their vigilance, he continued, trying to convince me, “You already know. I…can’t hurt Lee-kyung-ssi because of our contract.”

Of course the details of the contract we made in return for his rescue was deeply embedded within my mind even without his reminder. Honestly, that’s the reason why I was still standing here without causing a commotion. Without the contract, I would have immediately escaped the mansion the moment he killed his mother.

I nodded, confirming his words. Koo Hui-seo’s expression brightened at my response, and he began to approach me, taking long strides. However, as far as I’m concerned, the farther away from Koo Hui-seo the better, so I retreated back for every step he took forward.

After a few steps, I had retreated to the point that my back hit the door. He stopped in place, as if he was shocked.

“Why are you retreating?” He asked, tears threatening to spill out of his eyes.

I was dumbfounded by Koo Hui-seo’s bewildering intent, but it wasn’t easy to speak calmly to his gloomy face. “Why…are you trying to get closer to me?” I wracked my brain for a response that didn’t place the blame on him and yet accurately expressed the extent of my discomfort.

However, Koo Hui-seo seemed to take my question genuinely, without reading in between the lines. He thought carefully and answered sincerely, “I thought I was too far away from Lee-kyung-ssi…?”

“Is there…a reason for you to stick close to me?”

“Actually, my hearing still hasn’t recovered in full capacity yet…I can’t hear Lee-kyung-ssi’s voice very well.”

“……”

Damn!

In the end, I could only stare as Koo Hui-seo drew closer.

However, when Koo Hui-seo was about three steps away, a golden light suddenly shot at his feet like a laser. The light made a black sooty line on the ground in front of Koo Hui-seo’s feet before disappearing.

It was a silent signal–he wasn’t allowed any further. Koo Hui-seo also stopped walking.

Seeing Koo Hui-seo pause, Seo Dawon began to speak.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Tendrils sucking corpses under the bed? I’m def not kidding about eldritch horrors: that stuff’s pure ‘monster-under-the-bed’ nightmare fuel.

Footnotes

1. = simhabodhi in Buddhist lineage/line of thought. In Korean context, Saja is also used to describe entities that guide souls to what lies beyond death.

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Chapter 97

Chapter 97

“Tell him that it’ll be a breach of contract if he comes any closer.” It was rare for Seo Dawon to express his irritation.

I gulped once and did as he commanded, “I-if you come any closer, it’ll be a breach of contract.”

“…….” Koo Hui-seo’s expression changed.

It was as if the words ‘don’t come any closer’ was a huge affront to him. He looked as if he thought he heard wrong; Koo Hui-seo alternated looking between my face and the gold line drawn at his feet.

However, as nothing changed even after dozens of glances, Koo Hui-seo lowered the corners of his mouth that awkwardly lingered and muttered, with a pale complexion, “Lee-kyung-ssi, don’t you understand me…”

“…….”

“I don’t have anyone else close to me anymore except Lee-kyung-ssi.”

He acted as if I had betrayed him.

I felt uncomfortable with that attitude, yet, on the other hand, I felt pity watching his trembling body–like a shivering man left outside in a downpour of rain…I stared back, without saying anything to contradict him.

How many minutes went by?

In the end, Koo Hui-seo retreated a couple of steps with a melancholic look. “Lee-kyung-ssi is so fickle…” he grumbled, emphasizing his words by stamping his feet.

When I watched him, silent, his gaze wandered the floor before fixating on mine momentarily. Of course, Koo Hui-seo dropped eye contact first; when I saw how he refused eye contact, I came to a conclusion. ‘He’s upset…’

Would it have been better to leave him to his own devices? [1]

Of course, Koo Hui-seo was a genuinely insane person who killed off those he was dissatisfied with–his mother and his younger brother; it was a hundred times better to behave distantly than to be intimate with him.

It’s not like I wanted to blindly garner hatred, but it was far too hard to act intimately as he wanted.

“I had expected some affection from Lee-kyung-ssi…” Koo Hui-seo didn’t seem to be the type to stubbornly be prideful just because he was upset. He took the odd attitude of audibly muttering all his complaints, even though he avoided eye contact with me as much as possible.

I was dumbfounded by his poor behavior, but, at the same time, his behavior played its role in slightly defusing my sharp vigilance. It seemed foolish to be wary of something like that. Should I say that he was childish?

“Usually, it’s normal to be scared of those who would kill their own mother…” So, against my wishes, I unknowingly responded.

Still looking around at his surroundings, Koo Hui-seo’s ears perked up at my voice and, once again, he muttered to himself. “Lee-kyung-ssi said…I should start a new family…”

My throat choked up for a moment because I thought he was blaming me for giving murderous advice. However, I reminded myself that Koo

Hui-seo wasn't in his right mind–his words couldn't be taken at face value. I understood that his perspective was far from ordinary people.

"I only meant that you should meet new people. Find those that match well with Koo Hui-seo-ssi…"

"I like Lee-kyung-ssi…"

"……"

"I think we're well-matched…Lee-kyung-ssi and I."

That's how I received my first serious confession from a man–of all things, a sincere confession from a psycho…

I steeled myself, trying not to let my complicated emotions show on my face. The confession itself wasn't what worried me, but rather I was concerned with how I can refuse him without causing bloodshed.

We had an advantageous deal between him and us. He, who would soon become the guildmaster for [Red Dragon], was one of the few decent cards we had up our sleeves.

That was why Koo Hui-seo, no matter how crazy he was, could not be robbed of his life. So, I needed some plausible justification to reject his confession. It's within both of our interests to maintain a good relationship.

However, considering Koo Hui-seo's current attitude, half-baked reasons wouldn't make him give up easily…What could I say to convince him?
"Seo Dawon……."

"Seo Dawon-ssi?"

I closed my mouth, surprised at my own admission, but Koo Hui-seo's ears had already picked up everything. He asked, straight away, "Do you have a special relationship with Seo Dawon-ssi?"

"……"

“Lee-kyung-ah, what are you doing? You gotta nod.” Seo Dawon fished for an answer, giggling. I was forced to nod, feeling strangely flushed.

I wanted to deny any relation between us, but confirming Koo Hui-seo’s theory was the only way to explain my slip of the tongue. Also, it was possibly the most plausible justification.

However, Koo Hui-seo looked more concerned than depressed or withdrawn. “But Seo Dawon-ssi is…Before I was locked away, there were rumors that he was a dishrag…Did you know that before seeing him?” [2]

“What?”

“He was a very promiscuous man…I don’t think…Lee-kyung-ssi and he will last very long…”

“Puhahaha!” As soon as Koo Hui-seo finished speaking, Jung Garam burst into laughter next to us. He looked as if he was familiar with this rumor.

At that moment, I don’t know why, but my good humor plummeted. I glanced sideways at the Mage, inwardly clicking my tongue. ‘Well, I suppose it would be strange for there to be no rumors with that kind of face…’

Despite my rationalization, though, I felt oddly upset.

I wanted to shake off this mystifying disappointment; though Seo Dawon opened his mouth to speak, I cut him off. “Well…I can’t help it if we break up someday, but that doesn’t matter right now.”

“Really?” Koo Hui-seo asked.

“Yes…I like dishra–…I mean popular people in the first place.”

“Really? You have unique tastes.”

“…..”

“Hmm… I see.”

Jung Garam muttered to himself, “Well, I guess there’s guys with no dignity out there…” [3] Seo Dawon simply closed his mouth and looked at me strangely. Koo Hui-seo patted his chin, observed me, and docilely stepped back.

With that finished, we could finally leave the mansion. Koo Hui-seo, holding my hand tightly and not hiding his reluctance to see me go, said “Please come to the mansion at least once a month.”

“Alright.” I readily answered–we needed to periodically verify the reports on Koo Kyungman’s physical condition anyway.

Koo Hui-seo’s face brightened at my answer; he offered to escort us to the car and provide a chauffeur. While waiting for the car to arrive, I casually asked him, “When will you be authorized as the new guild master?”

“First, I’m going to report them both as missing, then temporarily take over as interim guild master. Afterwards, I’ll reveal mother’s corpse.” He nodded, estimating that all of this would take no longer than seven days. As we entered the limousine, brought over by the chauffeur, I said my final parting remarks, “Please watch out for Bae Jaemin. If he contacts you, let us know.”

“Of course.” Koo Hui-seo shockingly bowed his head to mine, brushing his soft lips to my cheeks. I looked at him, amazed at how he could look so unperturbed.

I was confused as to whether he was indulging in foreign-style greetings or if he had an ulterior motive. In the meanwhile, the glass pane of the window rose, dividing us, and the car started on its journey. I…had to endure the stinging gaze of Jung Garam and Seo Dawon, who watched it all happen from my side.

When the car left the estate, Seo Dawon spoke first, “Lee-kyung-ah. You don’t believe those rumors, do you?”

“What rumors?” I asked, nonchalantly, but in fact those rumors regarding Seo Dawon’s past did concern me. Just what did he do to be remembered so vividly by someone like Koo Hui-seo?

Seo Dawon, after staring for a bit, suddenly leaned towards me. He moved as if to whisper something into my ears, but, instead of whispering, he lightly bit them instead.

“W-what are you doing!” I shouted, both frightened and flabbergasted.

Seo Dawon shrugged his shoulders–turning on me though he was in the wrong–“Why are you so indifferent after hearing these rumors that I’m promiscuous” [4]

“What are you…W-why should I care about something like that!”

“You should grill me, asking whether or not it’s the truth, and burn with jealousy.”

I stared back in bewilderment, forgetting that I had been rubbing my bitten ears. The shock made me miss the perfect timing to respond back, ‘Why should I be jealous?’

Seo Dawon smiled at me, “When you said you liked me, why would you say the reason was because I’m popular? Koo Hui-seo wasn’t convinced at all.” He laughed, asking if there was ever an idiot who only cared about popularity with his date.

I sat, frustratedly massaging my neck.

However, Seo Dawon didn’t stop there. He also bit my cheek–the one Koo Hui-seo’s lips touched; when I froze, he grabbed my chin and drew closer, his lips almost brushing mine.

Jung Garam was next to us. He simply looked annoyed and sneered, “Are you really going to do this in the car?”

Jeez. What on earth is he doing?!

I couldn’t slip from Seo Dawon’s grip on my own strength. I couldn’t watch the sight of him coming closer–closer to my lips–so I closed my eyes.

However, instead of biting at my lips, Seo Dawon stopped a hair’s width away and, in a low voice, warned me, “Next time, if you don’t avoid Koo Hui-seo’s nonsense…I’ll continue?”

“It’s not that I didn’t avoid him…!”

“I’m different from Lee-kyung-ie. I get very jealous; remember that.” And then, he distanced himself from me as if nothing had happened.

TL: Thanks for kofi Hi-mi! This bonus chapter is for you!

We’re at the end of this arc! There’s a lot to parse–the nightmare fuel of it all. Koo Hui-seo…Confessions and MC’s dense ***dense*** feelings. I’ll probably write my own feelings in comments but also I wanted to ask. In preparation for chpt 100+… who’s your fave suitor? (Or character in general?)

Footnotes

1. The original saying, literally translated, would be “beat his own drum and play janggi by himself” Aka to leave Koo Hui-seo to his own delusions

2. Dishrag is slang for slut. A.k.a. Used rags.
3. = slave boy or those who sell their dignity for selfish reasons
4. = The thief turns on the master with a club. or Save a stranger from the sea, and he'll turn your enemy. or Save a thief from the gallows and he'll cut your throat. It's often used in stories where the swindler accuses their victim of being the thief. Thus: turning on me though he was in the wrong.

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Chapter 98

Chapter 98

Within a few days, news of a murder within the inner ranks of the [Red Dragon] guild became a national issue.

Although retired from active duty, Chairwoman Shin, who held the reins of half of the businesses owned by the [Red Dragon] guild, was found dead in her home garden. Her stepson, Koo Kyungman, was identified as the culprit.

At the same time, various news exploded in the media as the eldest son, Koo Hui-seo, whose whereabouts had been unknown returned to take over as the guild master.

In addition to the shocking murder, the media exposed illegal activities committed by Koo Kyungman while he was the [Red Dragon]'s guild master. Although the investigation had not yet begun in full, public opinion seemed to have already decided he was guilty of killing his stepmother and fleeing.

Of course, the news was all crafted by Koo Hui-seo, who had obtained and utilized the evidence of Koo Kyungman's weaknesses that Chairwoman Shin had collected over the years.

Therefore, even the executives of the [Red Dragon] guild–Koo Kyungman's right-hand men– could not block Koo Hui-seo's bid to become the guild master. Although they were loyal to Koo Kyungman, they were afraid to get involved in his business on the off chance that they may also be implicated in his violent crimes.

In the end, Koo Kyungman became wanted as the prime suspect in Chairwoman Shin’s murder. Koo Hui-seo successfully garnered his mother’s pre-arranged inheritance as well and formally rose to the seat of guildmaster.

I felt slightly complicated when I saw Koo Hui-seo’s gloomy face, photographed while disembarking a luxury sedan. He looked so thin and depressed; he gathered many people’s sympathies, but…

[Koo Hui-seo: What are you doing?]

[Koo Hui-seo: (emoticon)]

[Koo Hui-seo: …?]

[Koo Hui-seo: Are you perhaps busy]

[Koo Hui-seo: Could I call you?]

[Choi Lee-kyung: No;]

[Choi Lee-kyung: It’s five in the morning]

[Koo Hui-seo: Sleep won’t come; I still haven’t fallen asleep…]

[Koo Hui-seo: (emoticon)]

[Choi Lee-kyung: Hospital go-go]

[Koo Hui-seo: What does go-go mean?] [1]

He had been persistently bothering me ever since I went back home. That psycho talked to me at least once a day despite how much I broadcasted my annoyance.

Actually, Koo Hui-seo's constant nonsensical messages were tolerable… the problem was my servants' stinging gazes whenever he contacted me.

"Hey!"

"I was wondering why you were fidgeting…"

I was in the middle of typing [That means, go to the hospital] while lying in bed when suddenly Jung Garam snatched the cell phone right out of my hands.

Jung Garam wasn't the type to respect privacy at all, so I had no choice but to show him Koo Hui-seo and mine's conversation.

I understood he was angry, but I couldn't overlook how the Treasure Hunter appeared out of the blue. Wasn't I in my bedroom alone with the door closed? How did you get into this room?

However, before I could even argue my case, Jung Garam began to speak disparagingly, crumpling his brows. "Didn't we say to just ignore him?"

"If I ignore him, he keeps calling…"

"You don't have the money to change your phone number?"

"…It's fine to just answer every now and then…"

Of course, that's what I said to him, but it's not as if I didn't think of changing my phone.

The problem is that the cellphones that can be used inside the hubs aren't ordinary phones. I would have to go outside the hub to buy a new one, and I didn't want to deal with the inconvenience of not being able to use the phone for three days until the new SIM card arrives.

However, Jung Garam stared at me as if he didn't understand me at all and suddenly began to tap on the phone's keyboard as he pleased. There

was something suspicious about his idiotically smiling face. “…What are you saying to him?” I asked.

“I said that Eunuchs have no right to speak to you.”

“Hey, are you insane?” I couldn’t hide how absurd I found him and tried to take the phone away from the Treasure Hunter. However, I couldn’t catch him; each time he avoided my arm narrowly. He wasn’t even looking at me.

Frustration and the desire to win rose up within me, so I held a pillow high in both hands and rushed into his arms, so he couldn’t avoid me…This time, Jung Garam didn’t dodge, so I knocked him down onto the bed–as if I pushed him down.

“Hmmm?”

“T-this isn’t what it looks like!”

In addition, why of all people did Seo Dawon stride in through the open door. He looked at us with a mysterious look, brushed back his hair, and laughed. “What’s this, let me in too.”

“W-what do you mean let you in!” Even though I knew he was teasing me, I stood up in a hurry, goosebumps rising all over. Jung Garam, though, continued to lie down and look at the phone screen, as if he had nothing to do with this fuss. In the end, I gave up on retrieving my phone from his hands and retreated far away from the bed.

Seo Dawon approached me at that moment, “What about Lackey?”

“I put it in the subspace.”

Actually, Koo Hui-seo was not the sole reason I woke up so early in the morning.

After returning from Koo Hui-seo’s mansion, I was too busy checking the news that, after returning from the dungeons, I hadn’t even contacted Kim Sangyoon much. I refrained from doing anything that could raise suspicions. I focused all my attention on the volatile situation, listening in

to all the dealings that could lead to Koo Hui-seo's rise to the guildmaster seat and keeping in close contact with the pallid man.

Therefore, only when Koo Kyungman was confirmed as a suspect and Koo Hui-seo was relatively stable in his position, could we turn our attention to utilizing the significant level-ups that came with the successful 'revenge.'

Of course, the first priority was resurrecting another member of the [Red Lotus] guild. However, since Lackey looked quite anxious when he saw me injuring my palm with the dagger during the last contract, before going to sleep yesterday I spent time persuading Lackey into my system subspace.

Lackey didn't want to go in and couldn't understand me well, but after begging it a couple of times, the skeleton became sullen and entered the space with its own two feet. After the contract, I'm going to call it out and comfort it.

Having thought this far, I called out to the two ghosts, "Who are we contacting this time?"

"Hmm….."

"You're going to do it now?" Jung Garam, who had only been looking at the cellphone, decided to stop ignoring Seo Dawon and my conversation and squeezed in.

Well, in my opinion, all the candidates for the next summon were all quite similar; the most important thing to consider would be the two's opinions. After all, I don't know any of these people yet…

'I hope I'll summon someone more normal this time…' I harbored a small wish within my heart that the next person would have a better personality than the other two. Of course, I couldn't vocalize this thought, though.

"Let's go with Olim-ie." Seo Dawon said, as if he was greatly pained. I felt slightly nervous at his attitude.

For some reason…I thought that Kim Olim would be a decent person? At the very least, I felt that she would have a good personality compared to these two. So, I had actually hoped that Olim would be the next person called.

“Olim noona?”

“Mhm. After all, Lee-kyung-ie is a bit…”

“Huh? What about me?”

“Ah, Ahhhh…You’re right. Olim noona would be the best.”

It felt frustrating when they ignored me and formed a bond of sympathy. In particular, Jung Garam, still lying down on the bed, glanced at me and shook his head–how annoying! What about me required someone like Kim Olim?

“Let’s summon Kim Olim this time.” However, Seo Dawon brokered no further explanation; even though I was uncomfortable, I decided to stop my line of questions.

Because, after I got tangled with Koo Hui-seo, it felt like there was a line dividing me from those two; and, honestly, my experience with Koo Hui-seo instilled some wariness within me. What would happen if I was caught and tied up by Koo Hui-seo…Could I even last 1 second? I was worried.

“Alright. We’re doing this now, right?” I said.

“Yeah. Actually, I already prepared a magic circle in the living room.”

Determined, I nodded and left the room.

And, as soon as I entered the living room, I felt a subtle light shining beneath my feet gradually brightening. I stood in the center of the magic circle–the place designated for me–and took my hands out of the inventory.

As before, I was able to check which sealed vengeful soul was contained within the essences; luckily, the first one I retrieved was Kim Olim’s.

You've obtained the vengeful ghost's essence – 'Kim Olim'!

TL: Ngl, I was surprised at how many people chose Koo Hui-seo in the last chapter's comments! It was a close battle with Jung Garam. Still, noted~ Hope I can finish it before chap 100~

(Also Koo Hui-seo this chap is giving me flashbacks to some DMs/facebook messages)

Footnotes

1. **Choi Lee-kyung originally said Hospital,** . = gogo, it's the first letters of go in the korean phonetic repeated twice. This is common chat slang term in korean. Essentially, Koo Hui-seo is asking what (g g) means–he's a boomer who knows no slang.

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Chapter 99

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“I’m starting.”

Since it was my third [vengeful ghost contract], I felt used to the process.

I don’t know whether or not it was just my imagination, but I felt like I was moving faster than when I summoned Jung Garam. I didn’t stand there, dazed with the essence of the soul in my hands, but I took the dagger out of the inventory and posed in the middle of the magic circle.

Honestly though, why did this vengeance contract need a Necromancer’s blood every time? Of course, the class concept itself is quite grim, but I wondered why exactly it needed the blood of the living for the dead.

I kept thinking about it as I placed the cold blade on my palm. If it’s going to be like this, why isn’t the class named, ‘Blood Donation Master’ instead of Necromancer?… “Should I draw my blood in advance next time….”

“Does it hurt that much?”

“No, it’s just…It’s not that it hurts, it’s just a hassle…”

However, when Seo Dawon seemed to have misunderstood while listening to my murmurs, I wondered if I was making a mountain out of a hill.

I didn’t mean to save face in front of him. It’s just…I’ve been feeling for a while now that I wasn’t someone that instilled the slightest bit of faith in my contractees.

Of course, partially it’s because I’m too low level, but I was honestly shocked when Jung Garam said ‘I think I’m going to develop a mental illness because of you.’ How weak must I have seemed to him; I felt flushed when thinking about how Jung Garam, someone younger, viewed me.

So, I thought I shouldn’t be seen whining in front of my servants anymore. I tried to maintain a brave facade and quickly gripped the dagger with more strength, fearing that I might seem hesitant or frail.

To finish it in one go, I pointed the point of the dagger straight down and plunged it into the palm of my hand…When I put my heart and determination behind my strength, blood welled out of the deep cut. The issue, however, was that it hurt enough for me to whimper. (Of course, I didn’t make that sound because I was still putting on a strong performance).

I was acting pretty well, I thought; I looked at the blood that began to accumulate in my palm without biting my lips once, pretending to be calm.

Then, I dropped Kim Olim’s vengeful ghost essence to the floor; as soon as it hit the ground, the essence cracked slowly before fragmenting into several pieces.

I dripped my blood onto those fragments. The wound was pretty large, but the blood did not well to the surface much after the first gush, so I was drenched in cold sweat as I squeezed some out.

You have fulfilled the conditions for summoning a Vengeful Ghost.

The message popped up after much difficulty; I tightly shut my eyes, thinking that I had finally overcome this crisis.

Replaying the memory of the deceased: ‘Kim Olim.’

And when I opened my eyes again…

“Huh?”

Oddly enough, ‘I’ wasn’t Kim Olim, this time.

Of course, it wasn’t that there was no change. Instead of standing in the living room with Seo Dawon and Jung Garam, the scenery changed to the <Tower of Command>, where Kim Olim fought until her last breath.

However, unlike all the previous experiences, the memory wasn’t reconfigured from Kim Olim’s perspective, and I was left alone in the <Tower of Command>.

“D-did it go wrong?” I stood there for a long time before faltering and looking around. I was sure I entered Kim Olim’s memory…

However, there was a clear difference between the sensation of possessing a memory fragment and what seemed to be happening now; eventually, instead of waiting for a memory that might never begin, I began to look around.

I was forced, though, to stop even that casual investigation before long.

“W-what’s this…” It had only been about ten minutes since I started walking along the wall.

I couldn’t climb higher than from where I was standing, so I went below and saw something white–I couldn’t see clearly from above–at the bottom of the incline.

Moving closer, several skeletons lay scattered about. At first, it looked like dozens of skeleton sets, but, at a closer look, I could pick out five

skulls. Everything else seemed to have been shattered into many pieces, thrown haphazardly here and there.

And, at the center of the wreckage, the only intact skeleton lay leaning against a giant shield. From my point of view, I could only see the skull's back, but I noticed the large shield half-buried in the reddened sand. Recalling Seo Dawon's memory, I realized that the shield must have belonged to Kim Olim.

'So then, the skeleton laying against that shield must be Kim Olim?' I hesitated before slowly approaching. At a certain distance, a woman's low voice began to resonate in my ears.

[When I came to my senses, it was all over.]

I knew this voice from the memories.

I stopped at the sudden voice, but strangely–after a while–I couldn't hear it anymore. I took a few more steps, certain that whatever had happened had passed, but I started to hear Kim Olim's voice again.

[I was alive for a while longer, but I knew that I wouldn't last long. Actually, I didn't have much to live for…not after I realized everyone had died.]

"……" I became slightly emotional when I heard Kim Olim's calm voice.

She was…According to Seo Dawon's memory, she was attached to and cared for the members of the [Red Lotus] a lot. She started becoming a shieldbearer while complaining that there were only crazy people in the guild who didn't know how not to be reckless with their bodies.

She preferred safe routes so that no one was hurt, so she often quarreled with Seo Dawon about the direction of their adventure. But, she never wanted him to fail, so she often compromised with him. She began to focus on protecting Seo Dawon, the one who cared about his health the least on the team.

For someone like Olim, she must have felt great despair when she realized all the [Red Lotus] guild members were dead. Furthermore, she didn't die as neatly as the others and had to wake up from unconsciousness to witness the whole situation with her eyes.

That was not all.

[There was a guy who made vulgar jokes while stacking up our bodies like firewood. Red Dragon's Koo Kyungman….]

She even saw the enemy gloating his victory in front of the dead.

"…Koo Kyungman…has already paid the price." I rubbed my eyes and told her. I wondered if this news might comfort her a little.

However–perhaps she couldn't hear my voice–Kim Olim continued to gripe without any reaction to my presence.

[Lim Jisoo was drawing on Ragi's face with a knife. The assassin that used the red chain spat on Eunji's face…]

"……"

[However the most disgusting was Ryu Hyerin…I couldn't stand it the moment I saw her…]

Ryu Hyerin was the deputy guildmaster of the [Opera] guild and one of the targets of revenge. Although she did not actively engage in combat and harm the members of the [Red Lotus], she and her guild members restored the enemy's stamina and eventually made the [Red Lotus] members face an untiring enemy.

In a way, she may have seemed like the most passive of the opponents in our revenge process, but, in actuality, the ambush would not have been possible with the support of [Opera].

Wasn't it too shady how they united to prevent [Red Lotus]'s dominance? So, I wondered if Ryu Hyerin had done something, free of her facade.

Creeping close enough to touch Kim Olim's skull if I just reached out, I asked, "What did…Ryu Hyerin do?"

Kim Olim, who must have heard my question, slowly raised her skull as if she was only playing dead. Continuing, she looked back at me–the sight of her empty eye sockets made me retreat.

Within those eye sockets, dark red water incessantly flowed out, drawing two clear lines across the skull, past the cheekbones even in the absence of flesh.No matter how many times I looked, she seemed as if she were shedding tears of blood.

[She was crying.]

Like that, Kim Olim raised both hands to the ceiling, shaking.

[How dare she! She was weeping!]

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: And so we meet Kim Olim! The shieldbearer/paladin of the Red Lotus Guild. I can imagine how painful it must have been especially for someone who's primary purpose is tanking to see the rest of the members dead all around her.

Below is a depiction of Kim Olim with her long black hair and giant shield.

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Chapter 100

Chapter 100

After speaking, Kim Olim slowly began to sink into the ground.

That wasn’t all: the ‘space’ we were in began to collapse, starting with the huge shield her skeleton was leaning against. Flustered, I reached out to her bones right in front of me, but I lost my balance and stumbled over.

“Hnrrk!”

It was all because the ground shifted beneath my feet.

I stumbled and looked around; without my realization, the red sand unique to the <Tower of Command> and the skeletons strewn about had disappeared. Like a mirage in the desert.

Of course, this space was somewhat familiar because of the previous two contracts. However, unlike Seo Dawon’s universe scenery or Jung Garam’s deep sea, Kim Olim’s space did not feel as vast.

Rather, it felt like being dragged along by a river of sand and being buried alive. Even the surrounding air seemed to be getting colder and colder.

The deceased, ‘Kim Olim’s’ memory playback has ended.

Fortunately, before I got too scared, a system message appeared.

And, not long after, long leaf-like things that glowed white fell upon my shoulders and head. I picked up the ‘leaf’ from my shoulder and lifted it before my eyes; upon closer inspection, it wasn’t a leaf at all.

“Feather……?”

Contrary to my first guess, it was a very long feather. I kept scrutinizing the feather to understand what on earth it could mean. When another feather fluttered to the ground before my eyes, I looked up.

“Gasp….!”

Shockingly, a giant bird sat on a perch and stared down at me–since when had it been sitting there?

One of the bird’s claws, grabbing the perch, was so big–the size of my upper body. When we made eye contact, it lowered its head to my side, acknowledging my shock and interest.

The bird’s head, literally the size of a house, stretched out before my eyes. I knew that bird’s eyes were usually on either side of its skull…but it was horribly discomfiting to be observed with one eye by such a big bird.

Furthermore, the bird never blinked as it blatantly observed me. Goosebumps ran up my arms; it felt like looking at a dead and stuffed animal.

“K-kim Olim-nim…My name is Choi Lee-kyung.” I couldn’t stay intimidated, though, so I swallowed the dryness in my mouth and spoke as carefully as I could.

The issue, however, was that Kim Olim did not react in any significant manner. I listened quietly, but after a few minutes, I eventually fretted over her quiet demeanor.

I clenched my fist and pulled out the words I had been practicing within my head. “I’m here because…I’m a necromancer. My class signs contracts

with vengeful ghosts to borrow strength and, in turn, fulfill their revenge. If you would sign a contract with me…”

–Fine.

However, before I had finished my spiel, Kim Olim spoke into my mind.

I just heard ‘Fine,’ right now, right?

I hesitated, confused as to whether or not I had misheard or she truly consented to signing a contract with me. Then, I heard her voice ringing through my brain again.

–You’re not going to take out the contract?

Surprisingly, she intended to sign. I was embarrassed, but the contract came first. So, I replied, “Y-yes!” and quickly summoned the needed document from the status window.

Do you want to renew the ‘Vengeful Ghost Contract?’

When I pressed [Yes] in the system message, white light exploded from the giant bird’s eyes, which had still yet to move. I turned my head and covered my eyes with my arms since the prickly light could not be stopped by closed eyelids.

30 seconds flew by like that…..

“Choi Lee-kyung?”

I suddenly heard a husky voice right in front of me. I turned towards the direction of the voice; recognizing Kim Olim, only a few steps away, I retreated a few steps in shock.

But, she grinned at my staggers; she soon grabbed me by the neck and threw me to the floor. Embarrassed, I struggled, but I couldn't escape her grasp. Despite her normal-seeming build, we had a large level difference between us.

She had even climbed on top of my body in her pursuit to push me down. Then, she bowed her head as if she were preparing to strike.

Long black hair poured down until it tickled my cheeks; embarrassed, I finally stopped rebelling and looked up at her. She smiled, stroked my frozen face, and began to whisper softly into my ear. "Listen well, Necromancer."

"……."

"The only reason you're alive after you've said something so foolish like 'become my undead' to a Paladin like me is…."

"……."

"It's not because I want to get revenge on Koo Kyungman, Lim Jisoo, or Ryu Hyerin."

"……"

Her voice was sweet, and she had a mild smile on her face. However, I couldn't respond or do anything because of an unbelievable and unfamiliar pressure.

Some invisible pressure was placed upon me, highlighting the obvious difference in our power; I realized I couldn't resist. I felt like a bug in a human's hand. After being threatened by Kim Olim, I now knew that I realized that Seo Dawon and Jung Garam had been holding back with me as if they were simply playing around.

She looked down at my gasps, as if my lungs had been crushed, and then slowly took her hand off my neck. It was only then that my breathing could

slowly return to its normal state. Kim Olim calmly stared at my hacks and coughs before continuing.

“I accepted because I felt Seo Dawon and Jung Garam’s mana in the contract’s magic circle.”

“Cough, Cough….”

“The Red Lotus is the most important thing to me. Understand?” Kim Olim asked with an indifferent expression. I had no choice but to vehemently nod, as if I was struck with a seizure. Though she may be my servant, I thought she was capable of killing me.

At my nod, Kim Olim got up from her seat; she reached a hand out to me, who was still sprawled on the ground. I was too frightened to ignore that hand, so I raised my own, trembling.

Kim Olim easily snatched my hand and dragged me to my feet.

* * *

“Oh my…” A familiar voice said.

When I opened my eyes again, I sat, collapsed, in the middle of my living room. Kim Olim was standing beside me, and Seo Dawon approached, clicking his tongue.

“Seo Dawon, are you out of your mind?”

“Ah, I’ve forgotten about the peculiarities of those with the ‘holy’ attribute.”

Kim Olim seemed to be angry with the Mage, but he easily ignored her frustrations and approached me. Jung Garam, arriving late, grabbed her arm

and separated her from me. “Noona, did you hit Lee-kyung? Wait, I don’t see any strikes on him…”

“Seo Dawon, don’t pretend to be deaf and answer me properly.”

“Lee-kyung-ah, do you want some water?” Seo Dawon dragged me into his arms and stepped back, protecting me. Kim Olim raised her eyebrows and fiercely shook Jung Garam’s arms off.

Of course, Jung Garam was not daunted by that kind of power and instead stood in her way, launching his own form of defense. “Noona… Noona, you don’t know Choi Lee-kyung…He’s faint-hearted and stupid. He’s got a lot of fears too…”

“Was this your best shot? Answer me.”

“Olim-ah, did you use ‘Domination’ on Lee-kyung-ie? Or ‘Suppression?”

“……”

Not a single person made conversation with their dialogue. I wondered if this could be called a collective monologue…

I didn’t return to my senses until I sipped at the floating water droplets Seo Dawon manifested. To be honest, it was the first time a servant had ever threatened me like this; I couldn’t look straight at Kim Olim’s poker face, still feeling numb about all that had happened. If Seo Dawon hadn’t grabbed onto me, I might have ran away, unseemly as it may be.

However, we couldn’t continue to confront each other like this. In addition, the pain from the pressure–or whatever Kim Olim had used–was easing up. So, I raised my hand in the middle of their bickering. Each of the three loud Servants’ mouths closed and distorted, as if they tasted something salty.

TL: Sooo I’m a sucker for strong women >.< Especially women in dungeon novels who aren’t in traditionally feminine roles. I love the idea of a female paladin. Poor Lee-kyung will have a hard time winning her over, but I’m excited to have her here.

And with that! We have our 100th chapter!!! Thank you guys so much for reading along with my translation, despite how awkward I can be sometimes with the wording. And thanks to those who gave reviews/ratings on NU (I suddenly got a spike the last two days??)

As a present, I wanted to shoddily draw something for you guys–that was the purpose of the v v informal poll earlier.

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Koo Hui-seo! I’m not the best artist but, hey. I figured I’d try~

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Chapter 101

Chapter 101

“Hm?” Seo Dawon reacted first.

As Seo Dawon looked down at me, Kim Olim’s piercing gaze followed; Jung Garam, who was facing Kim Olim, also turned his head.

“W-wait a minute……” First, I tried to escape from Seo Dawon’s embrace. It was too embarrassing to continue to lay around, and Kim Olim’s stare felt unusual.

At first, I had no idea why she was so hostile towards me. However, I finally understood when I saw her expression as she saw Seo Dawon supporting my weight. ‘J-just as I thought…There’s no other reason that makes sense; Kim Olim must like Seo Dawon…..!’

Looking between Seo Dawon’s sparkling face and Kim Olim’s cool expression, I swallowed my pooling spit.

This hypothesis was the only plausible explanation; there was no way to explain her hostility. Therefore, I should maintain some distance from the Mage to avoid further hatred.

“Are you going to be alright?” he said.

“Mhm….” So, I pushed Seo Dawon away and stood up, nodding timidly.

Kim Olim’s fierce eyes followed me, but, as expected, she seemed to stop caring about me as I separated from his arms. Then with an expression

laden with resentment and other complex emotions, she continued, staring at her old guild master, “I feel like my trust in you was betrayed. I knew you had a fanatical obsession with your ‘scenario,’ but at the very least I thought you wouldn’t cross the line…”

“……”

“……”

However the resentful words that came out of her mouth told a different story I could barely understand. Jung Garam, at those words, closed his mouth momentarily. Seo Dawon had no change in expression, but, by not answering, the atmosphere coldly settled in the room.

‘Seo Dawon and Scenario……? What are they talking about?’ I simply watched the three of them, inwardly hiding my bewildered thoughts.

Instead of explaining more about the situation, Kim Olim released a loud, deep sigh and began piercing me with her tingling gaze yet again. “Have you fallen for those evil attribute ( ) bastards’ sweet nothings?” She asked Seo Dawon, reproachfully. She continued to stare at me; I couldn’t understand the culprit of her anger, so I continued to withstand her sharp barbs.

I felt sorry for myself, but Jung Garam, who had been standing docilely, stepped up to defend me. “Noona, he’s only at level 80 now…How could a low-level guy like that sway us?”

“As expected, those of *that* attribute are bound to be lazy.”

“No, that’s not it. He’s just cooperating with us, not trying to fulfill some evil goals through our power.”

“He hasn’t revealed his true colors yet?”

“Haaah…..”

However, no matter what Jung Garam said, Kim Olim maintained her steely attitude and would not relax her high-handed expression.

Seo Dawon, watching their verbal battle from behind, shook his head and spoke to me with a grin, “Holy attribute. They tend to be like that, especially those that enter holy congregations or enter into professions that serve a God.”

“Huh?”

“Basically, it’s a fundamental repulsion or hostility against those with evil attributes. Particularly, they tend to hold preconceptions against classes, skills, or monsters that went against the ‘natural order.'”

“If prejudice is always proven true, then it’s not prejudice. It’s a fact.” Kim Olim abruptly cut in during the middle of our conversation.

No way, then…Kim Olim is holding me to a certain standard just because I’m a Necromancer who deals with the undead?

I couldn’t suppress my bewilderment–she still looked confident in her words. Looking at her overbearing face, I couldn’t help but ask, “Then… How are you a guild member alongside Jung Garam!?”

After all, Jung Garam’s class is an Assassin! [1]

Kim Olim replied, though, without changing her stance, “Jung Garam attended worship with me every weekend. He’s also the type to pray for repentance diligently…..”

Does that even make sense?!

In addition, while Kim Olim spoke seriously, Jung Garam giggled and stuck his tongue out at me. And then, he shrugged his shoulders… “Look at my face. Does this look like the face of someone who can do wrong?” He smiled, chin raised high.

I was furious, but I was struck temporarily speechless. Because Jung Garam was right about his pretty face.

Damn it!! This standard of good and evil is so biased! Besides, ‘evil’ attribute is just a classification used for abilities or classes in the hub; it makes no sense to rip into me as if you desire my eradication.

I wanted to beat my chest at the unfairness of it all but suddenly discovered the blinking status message out of the corner of my eyes.

When I pressed it, the system alerted [New Servant ‘Kim Olim’ was added] along with the notification that my level had increased.

[Kim Olim – ‘Choi Lee-kyung’s’ servant.]

Class: Legendary Holy Knight
HP – 160,000,000/160,000,000
MP – 7,000,000/7,000,000

Loyalty: Extremely Low
Attributes: Fanaticism, Chaos, Endurance/Patience, Charisma, Leadership, Curse Resistance.

Title:

Dragon Slayer – violent crazed dragon. A limited title given only to the first warriors to slay the Second Company’s ruler, Aestheya.

<The ‘Dragon Slayer’ title increases all physical and magical attacks by 150%>

Demon among Demons – False missionaries, Corrupt officials, Habitually lustful devotees. You destroyed the city they built to rebel against God (Scenario – Buried); this is a special limited title given to you by Beelzebub, King of Demons. He admires that you have killed more people in a short time than any other demon.

<The ‘Demon among Demons’ title increases divinity by 25%, but you may be preemptively attacked by evil-attribute monsters>

Apostle of the Backlight – A title given to special knights that have passed all five trials ordained by God, accomplishing a feat that will be recorded in holy texts.

<The title ‘Apostle of the Backlight’ protects against the undead and dishonest curses. (Reduces damage from dark and evil attribute attacks by 50%.) Breaks all restraints while using sacred relics. (Delete skill cooldown times while using sacred relics).>

God’s Shield – Recognized as the true owner of the extraordinary ‘Rho Aias’ and can draw out its hidden powers. [2]

<The title ‘God’s Shield’ increases defense by 7,000% and allows you to use the ‘God’s strength’ skill to borrow God’s power for a short period of time through the medium of godly spirit.>

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Current mood: Kim Olim’s loyalty is too low, so her inner thoughts are hidden.

Durability: Infinite (If Kim Olim is attacked for more than her total health, she will be reverse summoned back into Choi Lee-kyung’s personal space, and the user will sustain the overflow damage. Re-summon Cooldown time: 24 hours)

Stats:

Strength +1,890,000
Magic +150,000
Stamina +1,210,000
Agility +477,000

Luck +32,000
Intelligence +190,000

Physical Critical Damage: 1,345% (+1,200% increase when using godly spirits)
Max Physical Damage: 2,774% (+4,000% increase when using godly spirits)
Minimum Physical Damage: 560% (+2,250% increase when using godly spirits)
Physical Crit Chance: 14% (+100% increase when using godly spirits)
Curse Resistance: 55.22%
Monster Defense Penetration: 170%
Monster Magic Resistance Penetration: 330%
Physical Skill Cooldown Time Reduction: 81.87% (+150% increase when using godly spirits)
Probability of Adding Additional Holy Attribute Damage when using Skills: 34.22%

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Main skills: What follows are the top five most proficient skills that are currently available.

– **Holy Affair:** May attract the attention of all enemies within a certain category.

– **Dash:** A powerful rush at a designated target that ignores their defense (However, the shield must be mounted.)

– **Pray for One:** Before battle, as soon as the sign of the cross has been drawn, all attack power has been increased by 50%.

– **Blitz:** Shove densely concentrated enemy groups with your shield, restricting multiple enemies' movements.

– **Nightfall:** Use both longswords and shields to launch an explosive attack forward. The more skill combos are linked, the more powerful and aggressive the attack will be.

Enhancement: 'Kim Olim' cannot be enhanced.

It was a servant's status window, similar to what I had seen with Seo Dawon and Jung Garam.

However, while those two's stat window only instilled a sense of admiration within me, Kim Olim's was nerve-wracking.

Especially the [Demon among Demons] title… I mean, since it's tagged as a 'Scenario,' she wouldn't have killed evil-attribute Users, but she must have received that title by killing an incredible amount of evil-attribute enemies/NPCs in a dungeon…

But the real problem is that such a person has now become something similar to an undead and has been tied to me–a Necromancer.

Only then did I understand why she threatened me, calling me Necromancer, from the very beginning of our interaction. Of course, her innate resentment carried within the deepest pits of her heart would not completely vanish.

I didn't dishonestly sway Seo Dawon into contract, in the first place, and Jung Garam proactively joined hands with me for the sake of revenge! But, she misunderstood and thought I approached the two with a contract for some nefarious intent?

But what most frustrated me was that, no matter what I said, Kim Olim didn't seem to trust me since/because I was an evil-attribute User.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Kim Olim is a dogmatic person, but she’s not unkind~ Before everyone is shocked, haha, I felt that I should probably preface her personality with some caveats of ‘wait until she’s warmed up to our necromancer’ >.<

But, this does tell us a lot about what goes into the class selection for you when you first awaken as a User. MC probably would never have gotten ‘Priest,’ as it may fundamentally go against his values. It also showcases how the differences in morality may lead to special classes. The MC, as a necromancer, has never done much necromancer-like things before meeting Red Lotus, so he couldn’t quite develop. The game given ‘attribute’ might also shed new light on the hostility between Bae Jaemin and Jung Garam.

Footnotes

1. Remember, Though he is a treasure hunter, Jung Garam opened up a special evolution path to become an Assassin–like a class evolution.
2. Rho Aias is the shield used by the Hero Ajax during the Trojan War in Greek Mythology. The huge shield was made of seven cow-hides with a layer of bronze.

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Chapter 102

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I suddenly recalled the man named Moon Issak. Wasn't he also hostile to evil-attribute users and was also a Paladin.

"Moon Issak…" I mumbled his name, casually.

At those quiet words, Kim Olim's expression suddenly grew cold. "Do you know Moon Issak?"

"Huh? Ah, No….. I just know his name….." Looking at Kim Olim's face, I hurried to shake my head no, worried that my head would fly away from my neck.

Jung Garam and Seo Dawon bowed their heads, waiting to see what I would say. I mean, why are they just standing there smiling? They should at least help out and stop her!

Whether or not she knew why I mentioned Moon Issak, Kim Olim, still frowning, talked to me in a somewhat softened tone, "If you ever run into him, spare your words and try to run away."

"Yes…Huh?"

"Moon Issak tends to be cruel to evil-attribute Users. You could even call him a zealot. He's the type that can't be reasoned with."

"……"

Speechless, I stared at Kim Olim who didn’t seem to notice the commonalities between Moon Issak and herself. Is this the epitome of ‘My romance, her Affair?’ [1]

However, in a way, one could say that she was warm-hearted enough to warn me about Moon Issak even though she disliked me. I looked at her, complicated emotions warring on my face; Kim Olim seemed to have misunderstood my speechlessness.

She continued, after a brief silence. “Well, You don’t have to be so scared: he usually won’t show interest in a fragile necromancer like you.”

“I-I see…”

“In anycase, in a pinch you can call upon me.”

“What? Ah…..Yep….”

Does that mean you’ll come forward to save me if I’m in danger?

However, I didn’t poke her to clarify her meaning since she was still difficult to talk to. In addition, after saying ‘I need a quiet space to pray,’ she barged into my bedroom without permission, and I didn’t have the opportunity to converse further.

As soon as she vanished beyond the bedroom door, I relaxed and flopped onto the sofa. Quickly, I brought out the recent vengeful ghost contract and meticulously read through.

The sentence I was searching for caught my eye.

Clause 3 of the contract.

3. Party B is obliged to protect Party A’s safety. At A’s request, they may borrow B’s abilities.

In this clause, ‘B’ obviously referred to the servant, and ‘A’ referred to me–which was quite strange.

How could Kim Olim, the servant, threaten me? Wouldn’t strangulation affect my own safety? Did that make any sense? Furthermore, a caveat/precaution was clearly stated at the top of this contract.

As agreed, parties A and B have entered into the strongest binding contract until the terms of the agreement have been fulfilled. Until completion of the contract, the contractual relationship between both parties will have priority over any other binding or non-binding agreement.

In the case of a “contract breach,” where the “contract completion” cannot be fulfilled, the party responsible for the revocation will suffer great risk.

After reading it, I couldn’t understand how Kim Olim was still perfectly fine.

Kim Sangyoon, who signed the [submission contract] rather than the [vengeful ghost contract] was bound to its clauses. I mean, this didn’t mean that I wanted Kim Olim to be injured or anything, but I couldn’t understand how nothing had happened to her.

In the first place, when I renewed the contract, only the name of Party B had changed; thus, I applied the same contract to Kim Olim without thinking too deeply… If one took this incident to its logical conclusion, wouldn’t this disconnect also apply to Seo Dawon and Jung Garam? If something were to go wrong, both of them could treat me similarly.

‘Don’t tell me……Was I scammed?’

With these thoughts tumbling around, everything suddenly became suspicious, so I had no choice but to ask Seo Dawon, who was looking my way, “Seo Dawon, Can I ask you about the vengeful ghost contract…?”

“What is it?”

“Can’t a servant not attack their Necromancer?”

I expected Seo Dawon to respond with a clear-cut ‘yes.’ Ominously, however, he said “Well…..” In addition, he had the audacity to couple the ambiguous answer with a sly smile. “Why are you curious about that all of a sudden, Lee-kyung-ah?”

Before, I would have answered naively and docilely, but frankly, after dealing with these guys, I gained a perceiving eye. That smile served to change the subject. I decided inwardly that I would not be pushed back this time, and I asked again, a little louder. “Servants have a duty to protect my well-being, right? But then how could Kim Olim-ssi threaten me?”

“Well…….”

“She….strangled me.”

At my firm attitude, Seo Dawon dropped his ambiguous smile and drew closer to me. Then, as if he were worried, he touched my shoulder and observed my neck. Gently stroking the veins there, he said, “I won’t let Olim-ie do that from now on.”

“That’s……”

“Also, about the interpretation of the ‘contract’ you asked about.”After that, Seo Dawon stopped in his tracks. He looked over my anxious form and shrugged before replying, “In conclusion, a servant can kill their contractor. It’s not an unbreakable’ contract.”

“……”

What a bolt from the blue.

“It’s implied that it’s possible to go against what’s written in the contract. Of course, there’s always a risk.” Simultaneously, Seo Dawon pointed out a line in the contract I was looking at. “However, in this case, the contract specifies that ‘party responsible for the revocation of the terms’ will incur huge damages, so there’s a significant risk in turning against the agreement. Furthermore, the ‘Vengeful Ghost Contract,’ is one of the highest-level binding contracts, and the consequences are larger. The more familiar you are with it, the less likely you are to break the terms. I don’t think Kim Olim tried anything with the intention of really killing you either.”

“…….”

“It’ll be alright? Besides, you don’t think I’m going to allow you to be hurt?”

No matter how Seo Dawon attempted to placate me, I was already deeply betrayed by the contract that I had placed full faith in. After all, that’s only Seo Dawon’s opinion; who knows what Kim Olim or the other future summoned Red Lotus members will think.

What I really wanted to ask pertained more than matters of ‘life or death.’ I was interested in their ability to intimidate, threaten, torture, or even kidnap the contractor. But, if they can kill then of course the other deeds are possible…

“We said we won’t let that happen, why do you look more depressed?” Unaware of my feelings, Jung Garam asked in a frustrated tone.

It was comparable to, or even worse perhaps, that if you were told that the cat you raised was actually a leopard and would eat their owner when hungry.

So whenever the light shined upon the depths of these guys’ hard-to-understand obsessions–whenever I would get cold feet–I would think of the contract and say, ‘But of course they wouldn’t do that to me…’

But that mindset shattered after meeting Kim Olim, and I could find myself in a bigger pinch than I currently am in now…What kind of lunatic would smile in this situation.

“Y-you guys….”

“Yeah, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“What?”

I held back my fears, wore a shaky smile, and held onto each of their arms. “Don’t hold all your grievances inside. You must… if there’s a misunderstanding, you must… tell me, okay?”

“……?”

“What are you even talking about?”

“Never keep it to yourself until you act upon those feelings…Let’s have a heart-to-heart…please….”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I came down with something I think (cold?) so I might be conked out for the next two days >.< We’ll see~

Footnotes

1. is the abbreviation of ‘ ’, meaning that if I love someone, it is a romance but if others do, it is an affair. It’s the tendency for humans to be hypocritical when it comes to themselves.

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After just 1 hour, Kim Olim opened the door and exited.

During that time, after begging Seo Dawon and Jung Garam, I summoned Lackey, the only one I could trust, and held it in my arms.

Since I found a loophole in the contract, amicably creating agreements was the best way forward. No matter how highly a [Vengeful Ghost Contract] may be prioritized by the system, additional clauses can be added as long as it doesn't significantly undermine the original contract.

So, I considered suggesting to Seo Dawon a few supplemental clauses…

'But even those may have traps that I might not realize at first…'

It's sad, but I couldn't even trust the additional terms even if I were the one to instate them.

I greatly lacked knowledge of things like systems, scenarios or the hub. As I talked to the two original ghosts while panicking, I keenly felt that I was the biggest hole in the team; although I'd already forded halfway through the river and couldn't turn back now…

[Clack Clack?]

So, instead of talking more about the contract, I summoned Lackey, who I haven't called upon in a long while, and used its body as a defensive line between me and the others.

As soon as it was summoned, Lackey hovered around me like a pomeranian, intermittently growling at both Seo Dawon and Jung Garam. Usually, I would have discouraged such behavior, but today I hid behind it thinking about my future steps with this already ruined contract. That was when Kim Olim exited the bedroom.

[Clack clack clack clack clack.] Lackey was agitated by the presence of a new servant, Kim Olim; however, unlike when it confronted Jung Garam or Seo Dawon, this time it hid behind me, snapping its teeth at her in an unusually passive manner.

It was just like how I used Lackey as a shield against Seo Dawon and Jung Garam earlier. Who wouldn't recognize it as my first servant–I almost cried when I saw how the skeleton was learning my bad habits. Haah…was it *that* scared of Kim Olim?

Of course, Kim Olim could unleash a deadly holy attack on the undead; Lackey, who had developed some talent in detecting enemies, was deservedly more vigilant than before.

Having fully left the room, Kim Olim had paused and stared at the skeleton but soon looked away. Though the image of a sentient skull may seem unpleasant, she probably had no desire to tear it limb from limb. I was a little relieved when I noticed her decision to ignore Lackey.

"What am I supposed to do from now on?" Kim Olim, turning away from me, asked Seo Dawon, who was leaning against the wall. Her words seemed to indicate her intent to join the party.

Perhaps she had relaxed while praying–Seo Dawon, reading her relaxed vibe, smiled in satisfaction; Jung Garam also relaxed completely, leaning back against the sofa.

Seo Dawon promptly replied, "We need to find the traitor and get our revenge."

"Traitor?"

At her confused blinking, Jung Garam clarified, “Bae Jaemin betrayed us. While working together, he personally ambushed me.”

“……” Kim Olim must have been struck speechless–her mouth opened momentarily before shutting immediately afterwards. However, she couldn’t completely hide her confused expression.

“Bae Jaemin leaked our plans to outsiders. Especially the part about the monopoly-contract dungeon scenario.”

Seo Dawon did not hesitate to continue, adding more information, “Several of the grudges we’ve accumulated over the years had combined then.”

“……”

“Those guys joined hands and carefully laid a trap for us.”

“Bae Jaemin could have been another guild’s spy from the very beginning. Although, I’m not a 100% sure.” Jung Garam said as he handed the cell phone over to Kim Olim. Bae Jaemin, attending his guild’s founding party, was searched up on the screen.

Kim Olim read the article with a pale face and soon immediately began reading another. Judging from the title, [Red Lotus Catastrophe], she was looking at a coverage on what had supposedly happened at the Tower of Command.

While scrolling through the article, Kim Olim had nothing to say, but her expressionless poker-face that seemed to chill with every word was enough to guess what turmoil she felt inside. Furthermore, the atmosphere in the home turned frigid.

“I understand.” Kim Olim, who had read countless articles for 30 minutes, finally raised her head. Her face looked unexpectedly calm, but her eyes glowed as if they held fire. “I realize the significance only now, but there was something that bothered me about a month before we died.”

Kim Olim calmly recounted a story that only she knew, “My car broke down, so I stopped by a garage workshop–not my usual garage–in Block 2. Since they said repairs would take about four hours, I thought I’d just eat someplace in the area. That was when I saw a kid who, from the back, looked like Ryu Hyerin.”

Then, she mumbled, “That’s right. There’s no way I could mistake her, even from the back.”

“You saw Ryu Hyerin in Block 2?”

“That’s right. Her face was covered with a mask, but I was sure she was Ryu Hyerin. I called her…maybe she wanted to grab a bite to eat together.”

I was surprised to realize that Kim Olim and Ryu Hyerin were probably quite close before she died. After all, eating together on a whim like that were things that friends would do.

However, I couldn’t bear to ask if the two were intimate because of the context of the situation. So instead, I focused on her story.

“But Ryu Hyerin didn’t answer the phone; I simply followed her with my eyes, wondering if I had mistaken her… At the end of the block, I saw someone I recognized driving a car.”

“Who was it?”

“Geum Miyoung. She was the female accountant in charge of all the guild’s taxes and financial documents.” Kim Olim pointed out a paragraph from the last article she read.

I’ve read that article in the past. I think it was the feature story posted after the government announced that it would reopen the <Tower of Command>.

[How did the Red Lotus’s disastrous final attack on <The Officer’s Tower> happen?

Subtitle: How the survivors of disaster recover from tragedy (Bae Jaemin's exclusive interview.)]

And the portion of the article Kim Olim pointed out was this

[(Excerpt)]

I dug up an interview of Geum Mi-young, who at the time was in charge of the guild's logistics and accounting, conducted by the prosecution on January 7th.

"The ledgers were kept by Seo Dawon, and the specific account for <TheTower of Command> raid was kept vague. The whole process was not transparent at all; the information gap enforced through an iron fist."

Red Lotus was a profitable guild that formed many broadcasting content and sponsorship partnerships with world-class enterprises. However, Geum Mi-young claimed that, in reality, the guild's financial structure was worse than many small companies.

Additionally, the guildmaster, Seo Dawon, had always said, "Don't waste the taxpayer's money. Do not accept commissions from the government, as much as possible." While demanding these strict restrictions, he had been embezzling funds needed for travel expenses or marketing for personal items. Any employees who did not comply with Seo Dawon's instructions were immediately terminated.

When I first read the article, I passively read without much further thought since the lives of those already dead had nothing to do with me, but…under these circumstances–after listening to Kim Olim–it was clear

that Geum Miyoung had also betrayed the Red Lotus. She took full advantage of the fact that the dead could not speak for themselves.

“We never padded the ledgers, and we didn’t mind if Geum Miyoung’s processing fees were a bit too expensive, right? Of course, it’s not like we had any desire to renew our contract with her either.” Kim Olim said, cynically, as she looked down at the article.

“I had thought that there would be more people involved than those already revealed, but…” Seo Dawon, lost in thought, also read the article carefully.

Kim Olim shrugged, “It didn’t occur to me until you all said that Bae Jaemin may have betrayed us since long ago.”

I listened to them with mixed feelings.

However, instead of being angry, Seo Dawon raised his head with a smile and said, “Nonetheless, I’m glad you told me this. I thought it would take longer to grab Ryu Hyerin by the tail since I couldn’t find much on her, despite researching.” [1]

With that said, the Mage proposed that we drag out Ryu Hyerin through Geum Miyoung.

TL: Above is a fan depiction of Ryu Hyerin that I found on a sketchy novel sharing site….I wish I knew who the original artist was so I can credit. There's a few more of her + kim olim and her + bae jaemin I might share in future chapters.

Also so sorry for being slow to update…I've been swamped by real life + sickness lately T_T

Footnotes

1. Grabbing someone by the tail = cornering them (idiom)

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Chapter 104

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Geum Miyoung was currently instated as the representative director at [Today Bookkeeping Co.]. When we searched her on the portal site [1], her photos and her impressive career history could be seen; similarly, photos and interviews taken with famous guildmasters existed as well.

Her prominent career had careened upwards in the last 3 years, coinciding with the fall of the [Red Lotus]; her new company was established just two months after the disaster. One could only assume from looking at that timeline that she knew about what would happen at the <Tower of Command> and prepared in advance.

“Each and every one of her clients is impressive? [Red Dragon], [Opera], [Virtuoso (DC previous chpaters] too… And recently she’s contracted with [HaHae] as well.”

In addition, [Today Tax Corporation]’s homepage contained the contents of the contracts with the large-scale guilds. As a result, our suspicions of her betrayal had stabilized–the contracts were not ones that could be leveraged by a newly-established company.

“It would be nice to arrange a meeting with Miyoung-ssi through Koo Hui-seo. We have a good excuse since the guildmaster position has just changed.” After contemplating for a while, Seo Dawon suddenly proposed meeting Geum Miyoung.

“Koo Hui-seo?” After listening quietly, Kim Olim asked Seo Dawon. Since she had been resurrected after the revenge on Koo Kyungman finished, she was unaware of what had happened since her death.

So, Seo Dawon and Jung Garam explained, in detail, all that had happened. Though the Paladin listened at first without much change in expression, a slight smile grew on her face when she heard about Koo Kyungman’s miserable fate at his brother’s hands.

“It’s a shame I couldn’t see with my own eyes,” she said.

“We’ll drop by to check on his condition before he’s killed.”

“But…is he truly planning to impregnate Koo Kyungman?”

“Cough…..” I was drinking water to the side while listening to their conversation when I heard Jung Garam’s last mumble to himself–I coughed, water going down the wrong way. The prisoner, the last time I saw him, was pitiful. When I recalled Koo Hui-seo’s pale and gloomy face, goosebumps raised all over my arms.

Lost in thought, I felt the silent, piercing gazes of the three servants; turning around, they were all blatantly staring at me.

“….What, Why?” I asked, flustered.

Suddenly, Kim Olim hardened the line of her lips and replied, “Don’t make such strange sounds while breathing.”

“Huh? M-me?”

“Who else?”

Bewildered by her words, I naturally began to feel self-conscious about my breathing.

Was she saying that I was breathing annoyingly? So, without realizing, I subconsciously covered my mouth my hands; despite those actions, Kim

Olim started to criticize me more intensely. “You’re too noisy. Do you need to drink water that loudly?”

“D-drinking loudly….”

“Didn’t you hear those gulps? Even those who wandered in the desert for three or so days would drink quieter than you.”

Just, what kind of verbal abuse is this?

I swore I only took a small sip. And, even then, I choked on that single sip and coughed…However, her cold expression didn’t seem like she was joking, and I couldn’t argue to defend myself since I was still quite scared of her.

“You get used to it the more you listen.” Smiling, Seo Dawon interrupted in the middle of our conversation. “Lee-kyung-ie isn’t being loud on purpose. It’s just that we can hear it at that volume.”

“Earlier, he was sighing into my ear, though?”

“Ah, that could have been a bit dangerous.”

What’s dangerous?

I blushed from humiliation when I saw Seo Dawon’s large smile. I wanted to yell ‘pervert,’ at him but swallowed that desire for fear of being loud again.

Come to think of it, I’ve asked about the matter long ago because they reported that even my smallest sounds could be heard clearly. At the time, Seo Dawon hypothesized that the servants were sensitive to every small sound from my lips because they were usually summoned by calling their name.

In other words, it’s not that I’m particularly noisy but that the system is at fault. It was utterly unfair; I clenched my fist, appalled and mortified that I was unintentionally wreaking auditory havoc upon their ears.

“Isn’t Choi Lee-kyung’s voice nice? I can fall asleep listening to him muttering to himself….” In the meantime, Jung Garam, whether to defend me or tease me, added his own two cents. Though I was glad that Jung Garam didn’t seem to care too much about my speaking habits, what did he mean by my voice sounding ‘nice?’ It’s just an ordinary voice with nothing special to it.

Kim Olim answered Jung Garam before I could respond, “It’s pretty high for a man’s voice–it’s not too murky, and it’s clear. That’s why it stands out when everything’s quiet. He has a normal volume, but he has a habit of dampening the ends of his sentences. Especially when he’s nervous, he has a tendency to not finish his sentences and instead mouth out the last words. Additionally, every now and then, he assesses people’s emotions and sighs; right afterwards, he’d release a soft yawn.”

“……” Speechless, I could only soundlessly open and close my mouth.

Jung Garam leaned aslant and said, “Noona, you really listened closely…” Somehow, it still sounded like he was making fun of me.

However Kim Olim nodded seriously, “Like that, he keeps on sniffling endlessly. It’s like I’m imagining a whimpering dog nearby; I can’t help but lose my focus.”

“So, you’re saying that you’re concerned about Lee-kyung’s whimpers?”

“Yeah. Something like that.”

“Pffft…..”

Just what are they comparing me to?!

“Just suck on some candy. It would honestly be better to hear the candy rattling against his teeth.” Kim Olim, still completely serious, spared nothing while giving advice.

* * *

“Now, breathe easily.”

I was covering myself with a blanket in the room; At Seo Dawon’s voice, I gently lowered the coverings.

Ever since Kim Olim spoke, I had been so concerned about the sound of my own voice, so I had no choice but to cover my head even though I was alone in the room.

I looked around the room, lowered my voice, and asked, “This…you can’t hear me out there?”

“Yeah.”

“Haah……” It wasn’t util I received confirmation that I breathed out loud and lowered my head. It was hard to make a conscious effort to sit still and not make a sound. It wasn’t like I could act impudently towards the Paladin…

“Why didn’t you just ignore her,” Seo Dawon said.

“Am I you?”

“Don’t be too concerned about her.”

Seo Dawon could be so carefree since she was his friend. As for me, who was threatened by her, it would be far better to stay under the covers for the rest of my life than to be someone who agitated her.

After seeing me shake my head, he leaned down and sat next to me on the bed. Then, with a teasing tone, he asked, “Why do you listen to Kim Olim so obediently? I’m jealous…..”

“Are you joking? You said it, didn’t you? It’s not true that Servants can’t attack their contractors!”

“Those are very rare cases though?”

“I was strangled immediately after I signed the contract?”

Seo Dawon took my flushed cheeks in both hands and forced my head up. It was a bit of an…*ambiguous* position, so I shook my head trying to make him release me. As expected, he didn’t let go.

Just like that, Seo squished my cheeks with a smirk. “If it was truly loud enough and agitating enough for her to not want to hear it, that girl’s the type to gag you or cut off your tongue.”

“……”

“She only told you to eat candy. That speaks of how cute she finds you.”

“I’m not cute–I don’t need this cute aggression!!!”

However, as soon as I finished speaking, Seo Dawon firmly pressed his fingers against my lips this time. He had often touched my cheeks, but this was the first time he’d touched my lips from so close a distance. I flinched, and my body stiffened.

Seo Dawon was sure to know that I’d feel flustered, but he still pressed down on my lower lip–as if he were spreading them. I couldn’t resist and opened my mouth slightly.

“…..W-what’s this?” I asked.

Something round and hard slipped into my mouth; when it touched my tongue, a sweet taste filled my mouth. The taste was similar to green grapes [2], but it crumbled quickly and disappeared without a trace.

‘Stamina’ increased by +1!

Then, out of nowhere, a system message popped up, informing me that one of my stats increased.

At my bewilderment, Seo Dawon finally held out his right hand, which had been held behind his back; he shook a tin case with the [Flavor 13] logo emblazoned on the lid.

It contained alchemical candy that randomly increased stats when eaten. Of course, I knew about the existence of such things, but it was the first time I've actually eaten it because of the high price.

I felt somewhat embarrassed after seeing the candy's wrapping paper, labeled [Flavor: Shine Muscat] [3] .But, why……does he keep doing such shameless things? He always makes fun of me…

"Thank…you?" I said.

"No need for the thanks. After all, I ordered it with Lee-kyung-ie's money."

Of course, not 1 second passed before the fuzzy feeling disappeared.

Afterwards, Seo Dawon laid me down and popped the candy one by one into my mouth. The last candy was stolen by Jung Garam, who stormed into the room, pouting, "What are you doing all alone in the room after setting up noise cancelling?"

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Would I spend 20-30 dollars on a grape bunch? No. But am I curious as to the taste? So much >.<

Also, I would say Dawon needs to tell Lee-kyung-ie his feelings straight, or the dense guy will never understand…but I feel like he's already dropped not hints but sledgehammers around to let him know. Lmao.

Footnotes

1. Portal sites = search engines/blog sites etc. Think Naver.
2. is literally green grapes, but it’s a common grape flavor found in korea. Tastes very different from the grape flavor found in the west. Try some if you ever find it at your local asian supermarket.
3. Shine Muscat is a type of grape… a super expensive grape (think 20 dollars a pount). Search it up! Each fruit is so large and pretty~

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Chapter 105

Chapter 105

Even as the deep night settled in, Jung Garam, who appeared like a storm, did not leave the room. He flopped onto the bed that could only hold one person comfortably, and Lackey, held in my embrace, kept an eye on him.

Seo Dawon was speaking to Kim Olim in the living room. I had wondered what they were talking about, but judging from the name ‘Geum Miyoung’ popping up from time to time, they must be discussing ways to approach her.

“Is it okay for you not to be there?” I sat on the edge of the bed and asked Jung Garam, who was still lying on his stomach. He must have been playing games on my phone–he only glanced at me before returning his attention to the screen.

“Why? Are you going to sleep?”

“Yeah, I have to sleep…”

Even though he knew I was shooing him away, Jung Garam only tilted his body slightly and did not stand up. After leaving me a tiny place on this bed, he shrugged his shoulders as if expecting me to lie next to him.

Dumfounded, I pointed my finger at Jung Garam. “This is a single bed!”

“How nice and cozy.”

“Are you happy with this?”

This punk, perhaps because he’s young, he’s absorbing all the bad slickness that Seo Dawon often exudes. After futilely looking at Seo Dawon in the living room, I tried to pull Jung Garam out of the bed by grabbing onto his arm.

Of course, Jung Garam didn’t budge one inch. Only when I used more strength and started to slap the back of his hand did he belatedly exaggerate what he felt, “Now you’re beating up your servants…”

“Haah……”

“What? Where are you going?”

Eventually, I gave up and went to the ground under the bed; Jung Garam peeked his head over the edge of the mattress and observed me lying on the floor.

Simultaneously, I felt a weight on my body. Looking towards my feet, I saw Lackey’s rounded body attached to my hip. Gently pulling the blanket over us, I took the skeleton into my arms. “I’m sleeping.”

“Are you really going to sleep on the floor?”

Even the energy to answer the Treasure Hunter was chased away by sleep, and a mangled sentence managed to mumble out of my mouth. However, Jung Garam looked down at me and began to poke me with his feet.

Seriously. Even if I were to hit him, I’d still be considered innocent right?

I blocked the bothersome Jung Garam with my arms, but the punk simply climbed off the bed and started rolling me with his feet. Frustrated, I groaned, “Hey…..”

Even though I tried to be fierce, Jung Garam seemed to enjoy my reaction. “Choi Lee-kyung, Let’s move. I’m doing this because I don’t have

my own bedroom.”

“Haaaah…..”

Of course, with the new contract with Kim Olim, the house felt more cramped. In particular, Kim Olim’s presence was so strong that the space felt even narrower…

“I was just talking about that topic.” Seo Dawon said.

Perhaps he heard Jung Garam and me quarreling, he and Kim Olim were standing in front of the bedroom door. I eventually overcame my encroaching sleepiness and raised my upper body.

“Someplace closer to the downtown of the hub. The size we’ll need should be around 10 bedrooms and at least 2 floors. How do you feel about scoping out some places tomorrow morning?”

“…..Mmm, Fine.” If one considers how we’re going to revive the rest of the Red Lotus guild members, that’s not too extravagant.

“Hm.” Kim Olim, who entered the bedroom with Seo Dawon, circled the room once and suddenly opened the bedside table. Don’t these people know that’s a very private location?

“T-that’s my diary…!!”

“…….”

Though I was a little nervous, I moved hurriedly to stop her from taking my diary out of the bottom drawer of the table. Kim Olim flipped through the pages with one hand before hearing my complaint and placing it back in its original place.

Well, to be honest, it wouldn’t hurt much even if they read it–I bought and wrote in the diary with hopes of becoming successful as a User. After a few days, I stopped and it stagnated in the bottom drawer.

….Or, did I? I couldn’t quite remember what I had written, but I was sure to have written something very ambitious and hopeful…

Still, since Kim Olim didn’t open it and read each page carefully, I didn’t say much. However, the Paladin suddenly grabbed the diary again and asked me, “The very last sentence in the last entry reads, ‘When I become a Necromancer Ranker, I won’t forgive all those bastards who looked down upon me…’ What happened for you to write that?”

“W-Why would you ask that?!”

“It concerns me that the page is stained with tear marks. Were you crying?”

I just shook my head furiously, red-faced and speechless. Didn’t you just simply glance through it? It’s too rude to read another’s diary in such detail!

In addition, the mention of tear marks brought a memory to mind; it suddenly occurred to me that I wrote in the diary while angry from being treated poorly after that first time randomly joining a party for the [Owl’s Ghostship] dungeon. Fuck…I think that’s it? Just as she pointed out, I wrote in my diary while in tears that day.

“Ah, that’s right. Hey, Choi Lee-kyung. You wrote that you need to attend guild interviews, but why don’t you have a guild now?” Jung Garam said.

“W-What do you mean?”

“Was it April 3rd? ‘No matter how I see it, I need a guild…’ After writing that, you never mentioned a guild again. No way, did you get dumped at the interview?” Jung Garam asked, reciting the contents of the diary.

He asked purely, with an innocent look on his face, but…Do these bastards really have no common sense? Why are they asking these kind of questions after memorizing a diary that someone hid in the table? It’s not like they’re my homeroom teachers or anything! [1]

Furthermore, seeing how Seo Dawon was smiling with a mysterious expression, it seemed like he had already read my diary.

“Hey, get out of here!” I tried to endure, but eventually I jumped up and grabbed Jung Garam, pulling him out of bed. Earlier he wouldn’t budge, but now he docilely allowed me to catch him and send him out of the bedroom.

Bang!

After sending all three servants out of the room, I slammed the door in front of them and quickly placed the diary in my inventory.

Crazy bastards…… They’re so mean to people at every opportunity…

Because of this diary incident, all my sleepiness was chased away and I was up until dawn. How can I get my revenge on these servants? Time passed as I bit at my fingernails.

I was filled with chagrin–how easy to handle must I be for them to act this way?

* * *

The next morning.

I stayed up all night, and, when the time to wake up arrived, I opened the door with the nastiest face I could muster. It’s late, but I thought I should at least get started in standing my ground.

“You’ve woken?”

“……”

“I tried to make breakfast.”

However, I couldn’t see hide nor hair of Kim Olim nor Jung Garam. Instead, Seo Dawon smiled, saying that he made breakfast, wearing a black wrap-skirt apron that looked good on him.

In order to not fall for Seo Dawon, who looked more kind and handsome than usual, I plunged the fork into the runny yolk of the fried egg that was placed in front of me!

“You guys!” I shouted.

“Mhm?”

“The Diary…Wasn’t that too much?! You can’t just read that thoughtlessly and tease me!”

Unexpectedly, Seo Dawon nodded.

I thought he would make an excuse for his friends and fellow guild members, but, instead, he drew a smiley face on top of my fried egg with ketchup. Dazed, I looked down at it and grabbed some french toast, who knows when all this was prepared.

Seo Dawon ignored my efforts to try and spear the french toast with my fork and simply directly placed it in my mouth. Eating like this was comfortable, but…it felt like he was deliberately acting cute, trying to appease my anger. Though, my disgruntled heart was slightly shaken.

Damn……Why can’t I hold onto anger for long?

“Y-You guys are seriously weird!” Eventually, I, though my feelings were successfully deflected, threw one last-ditch temper tantrum at Seo Dawon.

However, Seo Dawon simply handed me warmed soy milk and smiled brightly. Then, he drew a line in the sand as if he were an uninvolved party, “That’s right. Those kids are a bit bad-tempered.”

“You speak as if you aren’t the same…”

“Me? I’m completely different.” Seo Dawon said, making the argument that he, at least, had some tact. He laughed when I didn’t respond, but soon spoke in a serious tone, “Kim Olim and Jung Garam are being clumsy and tactless because they’re trying to collect various information on you.”

“So, you’re asking me to understand them?”

“No, rather than that I’d ask for you to make the best out of a bad situation.” Seo Dawon opened his mouth as if to say something more, but closed it without another word.

I said nothing, recalling Seo Dawon when I first summoned him–how persistently he questioned me, investigating my private life. Do all users who turned into servants change this way? I was appalled at that thought…

“You woke up?” Just then, Jung Garam’s cheeky voice barrelled through the awkward silence.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: FYI, I might have to slow down/or do a short hiatus as my school year starts T_T I’ll update more in the discord channel once I figure things out. Still mega-scatterbrained >.< but I’ll totally continue TL-ing~

Footnotes

1. This is, of course, referring to how homeroom teachers may rifle through your desks for sudden checks.

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Chapter 106

Chapter 106

“We need to go look at houses, yeah?” Jung Garam seemed to have lost every ounce of his attention into arranging new lodgings. After all, when I first summoned him, he looked around the current home and complained that it was too small; he seemed quite unhappy about it.

And behind Jung Garam, Kim Olim also creeped a few steps forward and blatantly stared at the food I was eating. Then she opened her mouth as if to say something, but, after making eye contact with me, her jaw muscles froze in place.

‘It looks like she has a complaint to raise…?’

Inwardly, I was concerned, but I couldn’t ask her because Jung Garam seemed to be too excited about buying a new house. I slowly stood up from my hunched sitting position.

So, as soon as I finished breakfast, I went with my servants to the stele at the heart of the hub to buy a new house.

Acquiring new lodgings within the hub was actually quite simple.

I don’t know exactly what was happening during the creation process within the system, but when one touches the hub’s stele, an interface with options for users to comfortably search for various convenient facilities or to spend money to build their own pops up.

In addition, residential areas within the hub have two methods of payment: monthly rent and wholesale/trade. The prices will vary depending on the contract period, the distance from downtown, and the size. [1] The current house I'm staying in was a small one-story house located a fair distance away from downtown, but it was quiet and homely in its own way. Also, the monthly rent was only 500,000 won a month. [2]

At this point, one may think that this process is similar to real estate application outside the hub in the rest of South Korea. Inside the hub, however, the accommodations are immediately built at the designated location once chosen. Every home was a new building. Therefore, it was important to keep on top of the contract payments and length because the house could disappear while one was sleeping in it.

"It's crowded in front of the stele today as well…"

This stele has always had a long line in front of it because it was the medium by which various facilities and amenities, as well as the tutorials, can be accessed.

Fortunately, when a User presses the stele, they're sent to some private system space. Thus, though the space was crowded, the line disappeared at a fast pace–no one had to spend a long, boring time waiting around.

Though there were already dozens of people ahead of me when I first arrived in the morning, it had already decreased. I was able to reach the front of the stele in just 12 minutes.

The stele was a large rock the size of my body, inscribed with strange, unfamiliar letters that I had seen before in dungeons. I stared at its shining blue glow before placing my palm on it. Beneath, I could feel the warmth–close to hot, emitted by the stone.

Updating User information…Please wait one moment.

Soon after, my vision dimmed; when I opened my eyes again, I had relocated to a luxurious carpeted room. There was no furniture on top of the carpets, but I was not flustered since I was familiar with this space.

After waiting a while, the surroundings flickered, and a black [system message] window floated before my eyes.

[Please select the required service.]

1. **Tutorial – Magic Use**
2. **Create Accommodations or Storefronts.**
3. **Register New Skills – Condition not Met**
4. **Guild Service – Condition not Met**
5. **Paid Service for Information – Not Available at this Time**

There were other options available, but were captioned with the explanation for why they weren't available. I stopped paying attention to anything else and chose **[2. Create Accommodations or Storefronts.]**

Updating User information… Please wait a moment.

Then, after repeated loading messages, the room began to change again.

The carpeted floor slowly began to break apart, like lego blocks, and the room itself disappeared. Then, suddenly, I was floating in the skies above the [hub]. It was like I was a drone, looking down from above.

Search for accommodation conditions.

Search for storefront conditions.

Just like that, the system updated its message window.

I clicked on [Search for Accommodation Conditions], and soon red lines began to draw over the hub beneath my feet. As I moved my gaze towards each region, the red began to fill in the terrain.

NH1: Packed with various shopping centers and convenient amenities, important updates to the system is applied first to this area.

NH2: Located beside the river that cuts through the hub, this area boasts a rich landscape. Residential amenities are concentrated here.

HH3: A bit out-of-the-way from the hub center, this place is both cheap and quiet.

Brief information about each housing zone was conveyed through the message window. Before, I would click [Sort by Price] to find the cheapest residential area, but this time……

“These are close to downtown, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“The major guilds are concentrated in this section. It’ll be easy for us to keep an eye on those who enter and exit the area.”

“The biggest room will be mine, right?”

[Clack Clack?]

Heeding the requests of the servants standing behind my back, I had no choice but to choose an area between NH1 and 2. Considering the incoming future members of the Red Lotus guild, the size of the house also had to exceed ten rooms.

The problem was, if we wanted to build a house in that area with all the accommodations they wanted, the price would…add up to almost half my current fortune.

“I-it’s so expensive…is that okay?” My eyes widened, surprised by the unprecedented price tag. But, the servants simply looked at me with eyes that seemed to say, ‘What are you doing, standing and dreaming, instead of paying quickly?’

Would you like to purchase this house?

In the end, I paid for that almost unfathomable lump sum.

The new house was located in a famous uptown [3] where a bunch of top rankers lived. And, with the addition of more detailed options to customize the home (I didn’t even know this feature existed), the simulated hologram of the home was the definition of luxury itself.

Thank you for the purchase. Tax information will be sent as a system message upon arriving at your new home.

Then, with that significant parting message, the process to purchase a house was easily finished. When I opened my eyes again, both the overhead view of the hub and the carpeted room disappeared; I was standing a little ways away from the stele.

The Users around me chatted amongst each other and glanced at me from time to time, but no one kept staring at me for a long while. Do they know? That I just bought a home worth more than 10 billion…

“Choi Lee-kyung, you’ve made it now that you have a house and all. How do you feel?” Jung Garam asked, giggling as he noticed my dazed appearance. Of course I still couldn’t believe this was truly reality. It felt like I bought New York in Monopoly… [4]

“L-lee-kyung hyung-nim?”

Suddenly, a big shadow fell across my way from behind. I turned around at the familiar voice; a giant in a tracksuit–perhaps he was out exercising–looked down at me with his eyes wide open.

It was Kim Sangyoon.

“……Sangyoon-ssi? Are you out exercising?”

“Yes. It’s my morning routine.”

As I expected, Kim Sangyoon was in the middle of his morning workout.

As a user, as your level rises, you will naturally be able to use extraordinary power beyond a human’s normal limits. However things like body type and shape must still be maintained through exercise.

Even very fat people can run quickly through skills, but they won’t lose weight on just that. So even rankers, who continuously defeat monsters as large as houses, must still work out at the gym.

Nevertheless, I was still a little shocked to learn that Kim Sangyoon jogs until he sweats every day. It may be rude to think this way, but I didn’t think he looked like such a diligent person who has a morning routine……

“By the way, what brings you here?”

“Ah, So…” He was so happy to see me, I could only hide my astringent feelings and pointed at the stele.

“Ah, so you’re here for the stele.”

“Yes, well…..”

Kim Sangyoon looked at my awkward hand gestures and my wide eyes. I thought he would leave soon, since we had nothing more to talk about…

“Then, shall we go to a cafe? We can’t just talk here.”

“What? Ah……Yes.” By the way, Kim Sangyoon was oddly active in talking to me, considering that we just met coincidentally. I could only nod at this force of nature. D-did he have something to say to me?

TL: Whoot~ new house! I’m going to upload another chapter within a few minutes, so this bonus chapter is for Areli! Thanks for the constant support and the kofi! Sorry this bonus was a long time coming T_T I’m so swamped with work lately…but I ended up turbo-translating yesterday, so I replenished the stockpile a bit!

Footnotes

1. Houses/apartments are measured in the number of pyeong in Korea. Number of pyeong is said in the original, but I said size for ease of reading.
2. FYI, that’s around $450-500 a month.
3. is a place where a bunch of rich people live

4. The original said which is a board game similar to Monopoly. I just felt that the english-speaking readers would be more familiar with Monopoly though.

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Chapter 107

Chapter 107

Ring–

Kim Sangyoon and I entered a nearby cafe–the first one we saw with a quick glance. Seeing as how relaxed the Warrior was–not overly conscious of me–the awkwardness was all on my side.

Didn’t you usually find it hard to talk to me? I understand that we coincidentally met during your morning routine…but was there any reason to spend time together and drink coffee at a cafe like this?

“What should we order for drinks?”

“T-Then I’ll have an Americano…..”

In addition, even though Kim Sangyoon didn’t seem to care too much, I could feel the stinging gazes of those from the next tables over. I wondered if I could even tell him that I’ve bought a new house in such a public space. It wouldn’t be just informing Kim Sangyoon but also informing everyone on the first floor of this cafe…

Kim Sangyoon: Hyung-nim, I…saw the recent article

However, Kim Sangyoon did not rush me, only sipping at the bitter Americano and smiling reluctantly, as if he understood everything. Then, he sent a strange one-on-one private chat message that was hard to understand.

Alternating between the chat message window and Kim Sangyoon's slightly greasy smile alongside his hand scratching at the back of his neck, I replied with a question of my own.

Choi Lee-kyung: What…article are you talking about?

Kim Sangyoon: Red Dragon! The person we rescued was Koo Hui-seo, right?

Ah, that's right… Kim Sangyoon was there during the Koo Hui-seo incident.

Whenever Koo Hui-seo was mentioned, my insides fought–I took a sip of disgustingly bitter coffee to calm my stomach.

However, Kim Sangyoon, with his face reddening from the force of his excitement and his nose beginning to run, quickly sent me another message.

Kim Sangyoon: Hyung-nim, I thought about something while reading the article

Kim Sangyoon: Koo Hui-seo became the new guildmaster, but…

Kim Sangyoon: Wouldn't he do or show his sincerity to us, somehow?

'Ahh…'

He was interested in compensation. [1] Only then did I understand Kim Sangyoon's active attitude, and the anxiety within me began to settle.

To be honest, if Koo Hui-seo offered to pay as much as I paid for the house I purchased today, I still would have refused it. But, it wasn't like I understood Kim Sangyoon's expectations, so I simply clumsily laughed and nodded my head.

Kim Sangyoon smiled brightly like a child–I wondered what kind of happy scene he imagined. That smile was brilliant enough for Jung Garam, behind, to mutter that he wanted to punch the Warrior.

Choi Lee-kyung: But…He…Koo Hui-seo, that guy

Choi Lee-kyung: He's in a bad shape

Choi Lee-kyung: I'm talking about his health…

After all, Mental health is also health…

I was afraid that Kim Sangyoon would propose we should visit Koo Hui-seo soon, because I had no desire to see the other. For the time being, using his health as an excuse, I wanted to dissuade him from meeting Koo Hui-seo.

However, Kim Sangyoon responded quickly after reading my message, without reading my reluctant expression.

Kim Sangyoon: Poor him…Is his condition that bad? Are you doing it today or tomorrow?

Kim Sangyoon: Grabbing an elixir from somewhere and feeding it to him, I mean…

Kim Sangyoon: Ah! If not that…What about Seo Dawon's ex-fiance

Kim Sangyoon: Opera's Ryu Hyerin-nim. Since she's a high-priest, you can request her to heal him…

…What? Ryu Hyerin was Seo Dawon's fiance?

After reading Kim Sangyoon's words, my mind went blank for a moment.

I looked behind myself involuntarily, wondering if I had misunderstood what was written. Seo Dawon, who couldn't see Kim Sangyoon's and my private chat, was simply looking down at me with a curious expression.

Choi Lee-kyung: …Ryu Hyerin?

Kim Sangyoon: Ah! Are you also keeping everything secret from her as well?

Choi Lee-kyung: Of…of course

Kim Sangyoon: Then, I will personally search for an elixir. Occasionally, there are sales…

Afterwards, Kim Sangyoon told me about his plan, but I still couldn't tear my eyes away from the word, 'fiance.' And, suddenly, I recalled Koo Hui-seo and what he said to me with a gloomy face.

'But Seo Dawon-ssi is…Before I was locked away, there were rumors that he was a dishrag…Did you know that before seeing him?'

No, it would honestly be more deceitful to claim that Seo Dawon had never dated–especially with that face and personality…

‘So then, even his fiance betrayed him?’

Was that why Kim Olim was close to Ryu Hyerin in the past? Because she was her best friend’s fiance? Was that why the Paladin was that much more enraged?

With so many thoughts warring in my brain, I couldn’t concentrate on Kim Sangyoon’s words.

Kim Sangyoon: Um, what should I do?

Kim Sangyoon: Lee-kyung-nim?

It was only after Kim Sangyoon asked for me twice, that I realized I couldn’t take my attention off this matter; so, I cut him off and decided to stand up from my seat.

Kim Sangyoon: If I make prior reservations at around 3,000 workshops for this elixir…

Choi Lee-kyung: That’s a good idea

Kim Sangyoon: Then you can…what? Oh, then should I proceed?

Choi Lee-kyung: Yes. But I’m a bit…busy now… Let’s talk next time.

Kim Sangyoon: Ah, of course!

Kim Sangyoon offered to give me a ride, but I refused and went straight to the lodgings. I didn't know how I arrived considering the state of mind I was in, but I still felt a strange distance from Seo Dawon–an odd feeling of betrayal.

'……?'

After thinking that far, I was immediately shocked and denied those inner musings.

'Am I crazy? Why would I feel betrayed?'

I was acting like I liked Seo Dawon…

Well, I had to admit: his face was handsome, but there were too many obstacles for me to like Seo Dawon. First of all, he was not even a living being, and his personality… I mean, it's not like his personality was bad, but…

'……Ah, I'm going insane? Why is it that the more I think about this, the more my thoughts get twisted?'

I thought it'd be prudent to stop thinking about these deluge-like thoughts.

However, that was easier said than done. Impossible. For example, my mind kept conjuring images of his smile that seemed to always find something cute about me, or the memory of him feeding me candy by hand–I hurriedly shook my head.

'No!'

Trying to stop these out of control thoughts, I pinched the back of my hand.

To be honest, I've been wary of the Mage ever since he appeared before as 'Seo Dawon.' He looked like the pinnacle of my ideal type–plus his

personality? I swore that if I fell in love with him, I'd be damned.

I've been known to do stupid things, but at some point all humans have to learn. My unrequited crush would have to compete against Seo Dawon's more compatible, innumerable past partners. That fact had raised a red flag ever since I saw the Mage–the data didn't lie. So, I thought I had distanced myself from him and behaved professionally.

But, I couldn't believe I'd be so agitated by the word 'fiance' today…

However, when I returned home and closed the door–and saw Seo Dawon following me–I couldn't hold it in and grabbed his arm. The action was so impulsive–I regretted it immediately.

"Hey, we need to talk!" I said.

"Hm?"

"I have something I need to ask you."

However, what was done was done–irreversible.

Seo Dawon looked down at me, biting my lips, with his red eyes; he raised his hand, motioned as if he were drawing something in the air, and lowered it again. At that moment, as if cotton candy had been stuffed into my ears, I could hear nothing but 'us.'

Fortunately, Jung Garam didn't cause any more troubles; he shrugged and sat back on the sofa. Kim Olim took a step back from us.

That meant they wouldn't interfere. Only Lackey approached, undeterred by the atmosphere, but it stopped a few steps away from the line that surrounded us, unable to cross over. Whining, it dropped its head and looked mournfully at me.

When I paused at the sight, Seo Dawon lightly grabbed my arm, "Shall we go to the bedroom?"

"Huh?….yeah."

In the end, I asked for this, so I had no choice but to suppress my anxiety and regret; I entered the bedroom with one last pitying look at Lackey.

Seo Dawon closed the door as soon as I sat on the bed.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: You ever been in denial so hard you start having a shoujo heroine monologue? All jokes aside, there's a reason why MC's reserved… including the fact that Seo Dawon's dead RIP T_T But hey! We've got progress on feelings 😀

Footnotes

1. The original said which means the paste bait used in fishing. Usually made of rice and soybean paste etc. Here, the bait for Kim Sangyoon would mean compensation.

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Chapter 108

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Seo Dawon's face, which looked back at me after closing the door, was full of curiosity, but he didn't rush me when he saw how hesitant, unable to form the words I wanted, I was.

I tried to keep as calm as I could, in this room full of silence, before opening my lips, "I wanted to ask…about Ryu Hyerin."

"Ryu Hyerin?"

"I mean…Lim Jisoo and Koo Kyungman had a grudge against you, right? So, was there anything about Ryu Hyerin you can pinpoint…"

However, before I could further beat around the bush, Seo Dawon released a short sigh and said, "You heard from Sangyoon, huh?"

"……." While nodding, I wondered if I had been too immature in showing my anxiety.

However, Seo Dawon, not pointing that out specifically, turned my body physically around with his arms, and stepped closer to me. And then, he asked, "Do you want to know what kind of relationship Hyerin and I had?"

"Of course I would like to know… I mean, you don't offer this kind of information unless asked." I tried to put on my best professional face forward, as if I was purely concerned for the state of our contract.

Contrary to what I expected from my prying, Seo Dawon answered coolly while staring directly at me, “There was a rumor that appeared when I often hung out with Hyerin-ie. The both of us used that rumor as well.”

“……”

“As for engagement…that’s another one of those rumors.”

It sounded as if he was claiming that he and Ryu Hyerin were putting on a lovey-dovey performance for business.

However, I realized that Seo Dawon’s answer diverted the matter of his true feelings from me; aside from his professional relationship with her, I couldn’t tell from his answer whether or not he liked Ryu Hyerin or what her betrayal meant to him.

Considering how Ryu Hyerin’s tears alone incited intense hatred within Kim Olim, I thought the High Priest’s presence in Seo Dawon’s heart would not be small. Perhaps Seo Dawon…had been acting this entire time so as to not attract my attention.

However, I couldn’t ask him if he liked Ryu Hyerin at this moment. Not only was that a rude question, from the moment that Seo Dawon knew I was curious about his feelings, I would be handing over the handle of a knife to the Mage.

However, Seo Dawon suddenly reached out to me. Gently, he stroked my cheek and whispered, soothingly, “When I first opened my eyes after being resurrected as your servant, all emotions, besides two, faded away.”

“……”

“The first was my hatred for those that have toppled me into this existence.”

“……”

“The other, a craving for the contractor that stood before me.”

Therefore, he smiled and explained that whatever feelings he had for Ryu Hyerin before would not become a setback to their plans.

After pondering what he meant, the shocking underlying meaning of his words delivered a blow to the back of my head. So, when he opened his eyes as a servant, he held nothing but vengeance and obsession towards me…

I had wondered why the resurrected guild members were being so nonchalant towards each other. If it were me, I'd run to them, arms stretched wide for a hug, as a fellow warrior who fought to protect each other on an unfavorable battlefield.

So, I left them alone, wondering if conversation would flow easily if I weren't there. It wasn't that: it's just that all those emotions have been swept away.

Why couldn't I have noticed this disharmony? I held onto Seo Dawon's clothes, distressed from shock, and shouted, "…Why. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I knew you'd make an expression like that," Seo Dawon answered, kindly.

"But…!"

"It's inevitable for there to be many restrictions when you're revived."

"……"

"Every decision has its own price." Seo Dawon held my trembling hand, as if he were telling me that there was no need for sympathy. "Lee-kyung-ah, think. Souls that a Necromancer would want to use must have great power. If such resurrected beings are burdened by the relationships of their previous life, then that would rather be more ridiculous."

"……"

“For example, let’s say the Necromancer is facing off against an enemy. But, it turns out that the opponent is actually a member of the servant’s family. Then, is the Necromancer supposed to give up and flee?”

“……”

“If the situation is one where they can’t run away, then what are they supposed to do? They must fight back or be killed. If the servant had as much ego as any other living being, then of course they wouldn’t be able to kill their own relative.”

“……”

“How ridiculous–a weapon that can judge and choose their victims. A weapon has no need to be tormented by something like that. That’s up to the living ‘human’ who wields the weapon.”

“……”

“So, when you’re a servant, all unnecessary emotions will vaporize, and all that is left is the craving they feel for the contractor; this is a necessary restraint for a weapon.”

I couldn’t talk anymore and simply looked up at him.

Seeing the Mage’s calm red irises reminded me of all that had happened to us. Meaningful words exchanged, his weird obsessions, and the way words that weren’t said out loud were conveyed through pointed gazes…

‘After all, you have a better weapon on you than a dagger.’

I recalled something Seo Dawon had told me one day: it was neither empty talk nor bluffs. I felt a heavy pain on my chest, as if someone was pounding it.

Similarly, I realized why so many Necromancers failed with their [Vengeful Ghost Contract.] After all, it was a contract that stated one must become a living tool without much promise for anything better after achieving their brief revenge. Even for those that have unjustly died, there must not be many vengeful ghosts that are willing to go through with something so crazy. What was more…there were probably even less people who had lived such shining lives enough to throw away everything to sign with a Necromancer…

"So, you don't have to worry about Ryu Hyerin." Seo Dawon raised my hand and kissed the very confused me on the finger–exactly on the pattern that symbolized my contract with him.

I pushed him away, startled as if I had been burned. "W-What are you doing?"

"There's something you want from me."

My fingers in Seo Dawon's grasp flinched. I missed the timing to deny him and simply stared up.

Seo Dawon tilted his head without blinking, as if he were staring at me through the sights of a gun. Then, he stepped closer–close enough for our lips to touch–before saying, "Command me, Lee-kyung-ah."

* * *

[Clack, clack!]

Lackey came to me, bringing the diary that I had stuffed into the trash can. Its expression seemed to say, [Isn't this important to you?]

"No. I'm just going to throw it away…"

[Clack, clack……]

Perhaps it thought it was being helpful and expected compliments. As soon as I waved my hands, the skeleton's shoulders dropped.

If it were any other day, I would have made a giant show of accepting the diary quickly, but now I couldn't afford the mental effort for such consideration. I felt sorry for Lackey, but I had to concentrate on keeping his head steady so he wasn't buried in the overwhelming emotions.

"What about this?" The Mage asked.

"…Take it."

Of course, Seo Dawon easily ignored my efforts. He came out of nowhere, asking if he could bring the vase that mother sent. Seo Dawon's expression was the same as usual, and I couldn't read any of his inner thoughts.

He had no problem lingering around me; perhaps, as a man who's had multiple people like him, he had no trouble miserably dashing the hopes of his suitors. Of course, it wasn't like he knew he'd done that to me.

I maintained my poker face the best I could, only inwardly grumbling. Since the metaphorical bomb happened last night, I wasn't sure if my poker face was immaculate.

Still, it was fortunate that there were things to be done at this moment. If we weren't in the middle of moving, I would have locked myself in the bedroom to cry alone…But, on second thought, I thought the servants wouldn't leave me alone if they heard me sobbing; I spat out a melancholic sigh.

Today, we were moving to our newly purchased home. The concept of moving trucks and the likes of traditional moving didn't exist in the hub– one had personal inventories that could carry all luggage. So, you just had to gather the luggage together and sort it well. Therefore, the process was far from hectic.

Reluctant to let the fact that I stayed up all night show on my face, I emptied the inventory to make room. After purchasing additional inventory, I only put in the things I bought on my way to the old home or brought from outside the hub to take to the new house.

The servants also helped with the preparations. Seo Dawon carried my luggage and helped to organize it. Jung Garam and Kim Olim were sitting on the sofa, ordering needed furniture for the new home through my cell phone.

[Clack clack?]

Of course, Lackey was no different. This time Lackey entered the room carrying flower trees in some pots that I had tried to grow a while ago. Actually, I was going to throw the pots away, but I couldn't bring myself to disappoint his tilted head. So, I simply patted its skull to say that he did a good job. The skeleton seemed happy, releasing a quiet [clack clack clack].

' 'Command me,' what on earth are you talking about….'

'Ah, come on…' Before Lackey's cuteness could sink in, I suddenly recalled how stupid I sounded yesterday.

Unable to stand it, I closed both eyes firmly. Even when I closed my eyes, however, the faint memory did not disappear. Instead, the vivid recollection became clearer, and soon I could distinctly hear Seo Dawon's soft voice.

TL: There's a few things to say that I thought were going to be too long for footnotes! So, I'll just put them in the translation notes at the end.

1) Seo Dawon, when speaking to Lee-kyung about his fading emotions, actually says something that gives the nuance of "roughly said" or "simply put." It means that there's more to this, but he doesn't feel the need to say it at the moment. Of course, Lee-kyung is more devastated about what this all means for being a Necromancer, and is focused on that.

2) This puts an interesting light on how Kim Olim was shocked that a necromancer would expect a Paladin to become a weapon for the 'evil.' But also how she views the person who put her precious people in a contract like this. I really do wonder what Seo Dawon thought when he first agreed to this.

3) I feel sorry for MC . He's dense, but I get why he's so willfully dense tbh. He's deep in denial…because being out of denial would mean acknowledging some awful facts. Including the fact that Seo Dawon is… you know…dead.

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‘I want you to get used to ordering me around as a servant.’

‘…..…’

‘Aren’t you curious? To see how far my obedience goes for you.’

Seo Dawon must have known my interest in him before I even realized those feelings. His suspicions must have been confirmed yesterday, when I asked him about Ryu Hyerin.

I got caught red-handed, and Seo Dawon must have prepared his mind in advance for that day. That was what he decided? To tell me to command him to love me? If that wasn’t ridicule, then what could it be?

Yesterday, my mind went blank the moment I heard those words, but, after understanding what was said, I shoved Seo Dawon straight away. Then, I left the bedroom and sat–absent-minded–in the bathroom for quite some time.

After I returned to my senses, I began blaming myself. Idiot. I should’ve said ‘no, I’m not interested in you.’ I should’ve shoved at his shoulders before he got close…

However, when I returned to my bedroom after three or four hours, Seo Dawon was nowhere to be seen. When I lay down to sleep, he didn’t come back to apologize to me or to say ‘let’s pretend nothing happened between us.’

After tossing and turning until dawn, I decided to ignore Seo Dawon ‘s advances from now on. Perhaps he didn’t mean to make fun of me or to incite me into conflict, but I simply decided to fold my cards simply because I had no chance. It’s not like I liked him very much anyway…I was just slightly attracted…

‘It’s not as if we have a future…’

What could I do with someone who’s already dead?

“Choi Lee-kyung! Let’s just throw everything away and buy new things. These don’t fit the new home’s aesthetic anyway.”

“J-just take this along!”

Fortunately, I had no time to dwell. Jung Garam yelled at me, as I was floundering within my own thoughts. Through his help, I shoved away my depressive self-reflection and finished with the moving process.

Do you want to terminate the contract?

Yes / No

And, after all the organization was completed, we exited the original home and terminated the housing contract.

As soon as the contract was terminated, the house disappeared as quickly as it appeared when first purchased. Since all necessary luggage was put into the inventory–and others thrown away–all that remained was a white block of land.

“It feels so…empty.” I muttered, looking at the plot of land.

Jung Garam looked towards me, as if he couldn’t understand my feelings, and said, cheerfully, “Let’s fill our empty hearts with money!” [1]

“……”

“Jung Garam, you keep on saying such vulgar things.” Kim Olim said.

“I learned that from Choi Lee-kyung.”

Normally, I would have been furious…Instead, I opened my mouth a little, couldn’t think of anything to say, shook my head, and closed my lips again.

Jung Garam paused at that sight and began to grumble, “Hey! Why have you been so depressed since yesterday?”

“Huh? No, it’s nothing…”

“What do you mean ‘nothing.’ You’ve been looking like death has arrived ever since you talked to Dawon-hyung.”

At that remark, I flinched, shoulders trembling.

Seo Dawon, smiling as usual, grabbed Jung Garam from the back and created some space between us, “Don’t pester Lee-kyung-ie.”

“……”

“Tsk, when did I ever pester him…”

With that, Seo Dawon dragged the indignant Jung Garam into his grasp; Jung garam struggled to get away.

At that moment, our gazes briefly locked, but I dropped eye contact first. Either way, it was a good thing that I was able to avoid difficult questions.

* * *

After that, we moved to the new house.

I travelled to the coordinates provided to my [Status Window] by a system notification after completing the housing contract. Seeing so many luxurious stores and the string of foreign sports cars on the streets near the home, it was certainly different from the old neighborhood. It was someplace I had only ever been able to see from a distance back when we traveled to the department store to order combat uniforms.

“It’s even better in person.” As soon as I entered the space where a mansion should be but only the front door was erected, a message [the building will be completed once you proceed with the tax payments] appeared. After selecting [Yes], the payment was fully completed, and the mansion began to automatically build itself.

As if it were created by building blocks, the mansion piled up from the bottom. After about 10 seconds, a luxurious two-story mansion with its accompanying landscaping had appeared before my eyes. I didn’t have any complaints about my previous housing, but it couldn’t even be compared to the solidity and the beauty of this newly purchased home.

My spirit left my body; I gazed at the white walls. I was only dragged inside because Jung Garam grabbed my arms and brought me in.

“I think I’ll use this room.”

“I want the master-room!”

“Uhmm…”

As soon as I entered the mansion, I was mesmerized by the open living room and looked into the yard. As I looked around the new house in a daze, Kim Olim and Jung Garam picked out their rooms.

Whether it was the marble floor or the modern-looking chandelier dangling from the vaulted ceilings, the decor assaulted my low to middle-class ego. But, since the interior design scarily fit with the overall house’s aesthetic, I could do nothing but stare.

Its feet thudding against the floor, Lackey ran a couple of quick laps around the house and returned to my side. It seemed to like how much larger our new home was.

Current Mood: I want to play tag with Master!

“Yeah…Do you want to do that later?”

[Clack clack clack clack!]

As expected, it’s happy. I made a promise with the skeleton that was tugging on the hem of my pants; the two of us began to look around the house in earnest.

First, I visited the master bedroom next to the living room. Alongside the wall was a glass-walled office, where Jung Garam was sitting and looking at his cell phone, troubled. Perhaps he was thinking about the layout or placement of the furniture that he ordered.

‘He said that only two emotions remained in a servant… Couldn’t Seo Dawon be wrong this time?’ This was the first time Jung Garam looked so spirited ever since he was summoned.

Jung Garam stared at me as soon as I entered the master room and said, “This room next to the office is the master room. I can share the bed with you, right?”

“Huh? But you can just place another bed here.”

“Who keeps a bed in their office? This place is going to house a desk that fits this place.”

Then is he asking me to hand over the master bedroom to him? His words were ridiculous; he complained so much before that there was no room to lie down in the previous bedroom because the house was far too small.

However, even as I shook my head, Jung Garam replied as if he couldn’t see my reaction at all, “I ordered a king-sized bed for this room on purpose. It can comfortably fit around three people.”

“I mean, why move if you planned for three people to sleep together.”

“Who says that three people are going to sleep here? You and I can just use it cozily.”

“I said we aren’t sleeping together?”

I don’t want to–it’s uncomfortable.

Jung Garam may look young, but he's a man. Additionally, he looked far too sincere for this to be a joke, so I anxiously and firmly rejected him. "I'm going to sleep with Lackey. You can either sleep here or use a separate bedroom."

"Come on…Why do you hate it so much? A pretty boy like me is offering to sleep with you."

"….When I sleep, I'd like to relax."

"If you want to relax, then just relax. Don't tell me, were you planning on doing something nonstop with me when I climbed onto the bed?"

"W-what are you talking about!"

"That's what I want to ask. What the hell are you two squabbling about?"

Suddenly, Jung Garam who was making such strange jokes with a sly face, straightened up; Kim Olim was the one to enter the master room this time again.

She leaned against the door frame, staring at me and Jung Garam. Of course, the ratio was unequal–she stared at the Assassin about 2 to my 8, so one could say she was actually just staring at me….Damn it, it's not fair!

"It's a misunderstanding!" I shouted.

"What kind of misunderstanding are you talking about, Necromancer?"

"S-so about that… I don't know how long you've been listening, but…"

"You weren't going to take advantage of the fact that Servants have to listen to your orders, right? No matter how you may be someone of 'that' attribute, I would have thought you'd at least have some conscience."

"No! I truly just said I wanted to sleep alone. Jung Garam's the one who's saying weird things…"

“I started listening when you said you wouldn’t be able to relax.”

“Pffft.” In the midst of all this, Jung Garam never defended me, and Kim Olim’s eyes, which were as cold as the north wind, were really offensive.

I hurriedly raised both hands, fearing that, at this point, she would really brand me as some pervert. “I-I’m just going to sleep with Lackey. Besides, Lackey tends to bite those who come near it besides me…. If something were to go wrong, Jung Garam may get bitten.”

However, Kim Olim did not hide her cynicism and did not drop her gaze; Jung Garam scarily said, “If it bites me, I’ll take its jaw off.” His remark was filled with determination to sleep beside me.

“Lee-kyung-ie’s going to sleep with me, though?”

I suddenly heard Seo Dawon’s voice from behind. Surprised, I tried to retreat, but Seo Dawon was quick to draw me into his embrace, back to chest.

While I was shocked by the unexpected contact, body freezing, Seo Dawon leaned his cold face against my neck and continued his war of words with the other two.

TL: Another way to read the conversation at between Seo Dawon and MC at the top:

Seo Dawon: I have a kink
MC: What’s a kink?

Footnotes

1. This is, in part, a pun! The word the MC used to empty could also mean vain! Jung Garam is answering both uses of the word!

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Even Kim Olim participated in this war of words, “To make sure everything is fair and square, I’d better sleep with you.”

“Kim Olim, how is that fair and square? Besides, what do you plan to do if his ‘evil-attribute’ rubs off on you?”

“It’s exactly for that reason I have to do this. I must sacrifice this body in order to see that he no longer has a negative impact on you guys.”

“Noona, how could a man and a woman share the same bed? Even if we’re dead, that’s no reason to not adhere to common sense, right?”

“Before being a man or woman, I’m a Paladin. Of course, if Choi Lee-kyung can’t overcome his evil nature and tries to attack me, I can personally ‘purify’ him, so don’t worry about that…”

“That’s what I mean, that’s a huge problem? Conversely, if Lee-kyung-ie is to try something, I can just smother him and he won’t be able to overcome me nor move a single inch.”

While listening to this moronic conversation, I grabbed Lackey, who attempted to jump at Seo Dawon, into my embrace and sat down. A sigh involuntarily made its way out of my mouth. If they’re going to be like this, what’s the point of buying a new house? We might as well rent a camping ground instead.

In a fit of anger, I first kicked Seo Dawon's shin to drive the Mage away from me; Seo Dawon didn't budge at first, but soon he let me go. The three that were deep in conversation tightly shut their mouths, as if they tasted something sour.

"I don't need any of that. I'm going to sleep alone with Lackey. You guys should just sleep together," I sighed.

However, none of my words seemed to make it through their thick skulls.

On the contrary, as soon as I finished speaking, Jung Garam banged the wall loudly and shouted immediately, "What kind of gross thing are you suggesting? I've never shared a room with another guy before!"

"I'm a guy too!" I said.

"Necromancer, don't be mistaken. I'm not proposing to sleep with you for an insidious reason. I just meant to observe every nook and cranny of your body while sleeping."

"That in of itself is pretty insidious?" Really, nothing I said seemed to work. Fed up, I turned around and returned to the master bedroom; the three of them crawled after me.

It's five times the size of the bedroom I used to live in, so there was plenty of space for everyone. But…why was it that I couldn't keep a place of rest for myself in this spacious house?!

Ding Dong–

It was then.

In the midst of our conflict, the doorbell suddenly rang. I hesitated, wondering who would ring our doorbell when we had only moved here just an hour ago, but Jung Garam's face brightened considerably, "Furniture!" The treasure hunter shouted.

With that said, Jung Garam quickly made his way to the front door. Kim Olim also turned her back to us–as if she hadn't been attached to her stance in the argument–and said, "Those could also be mine." Only Seo Dawon and I were left.

"…you didn't order anything?"

"They'll probably bring it all in. Moreover, won't the delivery people think that the door opened all on its own? Shouldn't you go?" Seo Dawon returned my awkward question with a calm response. I sighed, left with no choice but to follow the two that sped ahead.

But……

"It's been a long time, Lee-kyung-ssi."

In front of the wide open front door was not our furniture, but Koo Hui-seo sitting in a wheelchair.

* * *

Two large suited users, probably Red Dragon guild members, stood next to Koo Hui-seo. In the back, a man of similar size pushed Koo Hui-seo's wheelchair.

I froze, so utterly surprised at the appearance of the unexpected visitor. However, Koo Hui-seo gracefully crossed the threshold into the house, even though I didn't invite him in, and handed me a large bouquet of flowers that he was holding within his arms.

"I didn't think you were going to invite me to your house soon, but I still wanted to win the title of being your first guest…Since I heard you were moving, I hurried on over." He smiled shyly with his eyes.

God damn it. Why did he come over when he knew I wouldn't extend an invitation? "Haah…." I failed to keep a straight face and, eventually, sighed deeply. The servants alone were successful in cluttering my mind, and now this lunatic came all the way here…

"I don't have any furniture or anything right now…You won't have any place to sit…"

"I'll be fine–I use a wheelchair, after all."

Did he expect this situation and brought a wheelchair because of that?

I was honestly annoyed, but I couldn't turn him away. So, I stepped aside.

Then, the large men surrounding Koo Hui-seo moved him from the porch, to the hallway, and finally to the living room. After moving their master, they exited the living room and disappeared out the door.

They probably intended for us to speak comfortably… To be honest, I would have felt more relieved if those big guys that accompanied Koo Hui-seo were to stay; I was sorry to see them vanish.

"I was wondering…As soon as I opened the door, I smelled a stink similar to the stench of a decaying body."

"This is Koo Hui-seo? He looks completely different from when I last saw him."

Of course, my servants were by my side. Jung Garam, in particular, did not hide his hostility exacerbated by his disappointment that the visitor was not the furniture that he had been waiting for. He held his nose, saying that Koo Hui-seo gave off a stench.

However, since I couldn't smell anything, I couldn't help but wonder what exactly he smelled.

Suddenly, I felt Seo Dawon moving behind me. "Summon me, Lee-kyung-ah."

"……[Seo Dawon]." I should be more relieved once Seo Dawon was summoned. The ghost hesitated momentarily, but was summoned as he was ordered.

As soon as I called his name, Seo Dawon manifested between me and Koo Hui-seo. If it were me, I would've been utterly surprised if someone just appeared in front of me, but Koo Hui-seo did not move. Of course, no friendly greetings were exchanged.

Seo Dawon spoke first. After calmly stepping onto the floor, he lowered his eyes and smiled, "It's a bit troublesome for you to visit 'our' house without notice like this."

"Since it wasn't about the contract and about personal matters, I didn't feel the need to tell you. Anyways, we're meeting soon, right? After all, you've contacted me about Geum Miyoung…"

"Private matters should all the more be managed through me–Lee-kyung-ie and I have a special relationship. Moreover, contacting Geum Miyoung should be done through your side first."

The coldness that permeated through the conversation was as bloodthirsty as the softness of their tone.

I was briefly shaken by Seo Dawon proclaiming our 'special relationship,' but I couldn't deny it. It could be said that we were borrowing a tiger's shadow to divert a fox's attention…Moreover, until recently, I was bothered by Koo Hui-seo's constant messages.

However, Koo Hui-seo wasn't considered a psycho for nothing. He did not back down despite the Mage's intimidation and, instead, said, pointing at the flower bouquet, "That's an Erica Flower. In flower language, it means 'to break, beautiful loneliness.' I chose it because I wanted to improve our awkward relationship." [1]

"….."

He adopted a uniquely shy look.

Of course, at his explanation, I hurriedly placed the bouquet on the floor with a sour expression. He may have had those intentions when he was choosing the flowers, but, after learning that Seo Dawon and I were living together, did he really have to sit there and explain to us what his gift meant in flower language? Besides, without furniture there was no other place to put it.

As soon as I put down the bouquet, Seo Dawon squashed the stems of the flowers with his boots. He didn't even try to excuse it as a mistake, but audaciously and blatantly did it. I apologized in a hurry because I felt uncomfortable, but Koo Hui-seo slowly blinked his sunken eyes as if to tell me it's all right.

A stifling silence settled between us. After wringing my hands nervously, I talked to Koo Hui-seo, hoping this would be enough.
"Umm…….Anyways, thank you for coming to congratulate us. Well then, see you later?"

"It hasn't been even 3 minutes since I've arrived though……"

"Shouldn't you be grateful that we've allowed you to waste 180 seconds?" Seo Dawon said.

"Either way, 180 seconds are still 3 minutes."

"…..Haah."

In the end, I sighed for the second time in this conversation. "Then, maybe I can offer a cup of tea……"

"Yes. Hibiscus tea please."

"Hibiscus……I don't have anything like that…..I just have green tea bags."

"I guess there's no other choice. Then, I'll have that….."

Even before I was finished recommending which tea, Koo Hui-seo had nodded.

I mean, how can he be so brazen after barging his way in like that? Pressing down my rising temper, I took out the electric pot and green tea bags that I had placed in my inventory. Fortunately, the new house included an island counter, so we could move there for tea.

TL: Bold man that Koo Hui-seo. He's probably Seo Dawon's least fave person right now.

Also, the proofreaders and I were talking and we were making some bets. Our bet rn is that Lee-kyung's first kiss is going to go to Jung Garam (because the guy takes so many liberties and Seo Dawon lets him lmao)

Footnotes

1. An erica flower is also called a 'heath' flower in English. Coincidentally, flower languages differ culture by culture. In Korean, it usually means beautiful loneliness, solitude, and soulmate–which really does convey what Koo Hui-seo feels and what he wants from Lee-kyung. Coincidentally, in English flower language, Erica means 'endless love' and 'admiration'.

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“Geum Miyoung contacted me first.” Koo Hui-seo gently blew on the green tea held inside a mug I received as a freebie with the [Hanyang Ribs] logo printed on it. [1] Then, after taking a sip, he dropped it somewhere far away from him and began to get to the point. “Following my mother’s funeral, she approached saying she’d like to discuss the contract again. Because the contract was signed under the [Red Dragon] guild’s name, it would be hard to break; but, it’s not impossible.”

“Did she say anything in particular?”

“She said she’ll negotiate through my secretary but asked if I had anything in my schedule in 12 days. I refused to respond on the spot and said I would contact her separately.”

Lackey began to play with the mug that was placed on the ground at a distance. The hot water spilled onto the floor, but no one but me seemed to be paying that mess any attention.

When I gestured at Lackey to order it to stay still, Seo Dawon grabbed my hand and lowered it under the table. Simultaneously, the spilled water began to quickly evaporate.

Feeling awkward for no reason, I stared at both Seo Dawon and Koo Hui-seo, but the newly initiated guild master must have been staring at me all the while. Our eyes met instantly. I mean, if you’re in a conversation with Seo Dawon, why must you focus on me–a radish kimchi… [2]

“A-apologies, I was a bit bothered, so….” I stuttered my apologies quickly, embarrassed he noticed me.

Koo Hui-seo smiled–his eyes slit–pretending to be a nice person. “No, no. Watching him from the side, I just think Lee-kyung-ssi is so cute.

“…….”

Although, of course, what followed was completely off context and burdensome.

I glanced at Seo Dawon involuntarily. I was both curious and worried about his reaction; the Mage was historically aggressive when Koo Hui-seo said something that crossed the line to me.

“Ha ha.” However, when our gazes locked, Seo Dawon smiled as if he were thoroughly enjoying himself. Then, instead of getting angry or rebuking Koo Hui-seo’s words, he suddenly kissed me on the cheek.

I almost flinched away, but, perhaps because Seo Dawon still held firmly onto my hand, I couldn’t move one inch and was forced to suffer. After seeing our public display of affections, Koo Hui-seo rolled his eyes and started to look at Seo Dawon from then on.

“That’s right. He’s so cute, I can’t help but to do this,” The Mage said.

“……”

It would have been cringe-worthy if we were the only ones privy to such a childish conflict, but there was a very interested audience behind us that were just shy of popping some popcorn…I bowed my head in shame.

However, just because I bowed my head, it didn’t mean that I couldn’t block Jung Garam’s and Kim Olim’s conversation.

“Pffthahaha. If I were Koo Hui-seo, I would’ve hit hyung.”

“Does Koo Hui-seo like Choi Lee-kyung? The bloodthirst coming off him is extraordinary.”

“Honestly, if Lee-kyung-ie were home alone today, he would’ve tried to do something? That guy kept on trying to coax him over or ask if Lee-kyung was home alone.”

“….What? Choi Lee-kyung. It’s prohibited for you to meet with Koo Hui-seo alone now. If you hear me, nod your head.”

Of course, I ignored them. In the first place, I had no intention to meet Koo Hui-seo alone, and I wanted to ignore their conversation.

However, Jung Garam continued to tease, as if he were having fun. “I’m also going to kiss cutie Lee-kyung-ie later. I’ll do it on his left cheek.”

“Ridiculous. Then, am I supposed to kiss him on his lips?” Kim Olim retorted.

Just–you don’t have to do that…!

Listening to the voices of Kim Olim and Jung Garam quarreling with each other, perhaps this is what happens to those that have been with the [Red Lotus] guild for a long while. Whether this person or that person, they seem to be flinging their fists at whomever they please, with disregard to others’ feelings.

“… And then, a follow-up call came–we agreed to meet this month. Geum Miyoung sent an invitation to a party, saying that she’d love for me to attend with a partner. That’s why, this time, I thought it’d be prudent for Lee-kyung-ssi and I to go together.” Meanwhile, Koo Hui-seo fixated his eyes upon me again and explained his arrangements with Geum Miyoung. Since we didn’t know how far Geum Miyoung’s background with these shady dealings extend, he probably meant for me to accompany him to survey the situation.

I nodded softly in agreement even though I had reservations about being alone with him–appearing as his partner at that.

However, Seo Dawon attacked that line of thought. “Bring a different partner. I think it’d be good to bring Kim Sangyoon this time.”

"……H-huh?"

"Kim…Sangyoon? Who's he?"

He's bringing up Sangyoon in this situation again? Flustered, I stared at Seo Dawon, but the Mage simply shrugged his shoulders and continued, "Geum Miyoung asked to meet with you for a simple reason: she's curious about Koo Kyungman who betrayed their alliance and disappeared. So, she's itching to hear the cause from your mouths directly under the pretense of inviting you to a party. Further, those bastards don't know anything about you, right? After all, you've been imprisoned in the hospital until now."

"……"

"In my eyes, I judge that it would be far too dangerous to bring Lee-kyung-ie as a partner just to gather information. Lee-kyung-ie's exposure should be delayed as long as possible."

If it were to be known that I'm somehow connected to Koo Hui-seo, the amount of surveillance and scrutiny I would encounter would pale to the paltry amount of times I've met Bae Jaemin.

I didn't think that far, but Seo Dawon's words did not seem like a simple excuse to not let Koo Hui-seo take me as his partner. Koo Hui-seo also fell silent, unable to refute that logic.

Then, after a short while, Koo Hui-seo, as if implicitly agreeing with Kim Sangyoon as the better choice, asked Seo Dawon, "This Kim Sangyoon… How deeply is he involved in this business?"

"Rumors of your younger brother have probably yet to reach his ears?"

"…I guess he's a reliable person?"

"He was with us at the hospital."

Koo Hui-seo lowered his head briefly, touching the tips of his fingers against each other, before undoubtedly nodding his head once. Afterwards,

he suddenly pulled something black and long–like an antenna–from behind his back.

Looking at him, I wondered what he was doing but wasn't very wary; however, I was surprised to see Kim Olim clear the distance between us in the blink of an eye and stand on the table, blocking the path between Koo Hui-seo and me with her large shield. When on earth did you get here? Weren't you playing around with Jung Garam just moments earlier?

Of course, Koo Hui-seo, who couldn't see Kim Olim, slowly prodded this black tentacle-like thing towards Lackey without noticing Kim Olim's sword pointed at the tip of his chin. When Lackey felt the tentacle tapping at its shoulder, it tilted its skull and gently handed Koo Hui-seo the mug it was holding.

Gracefully receiving the mug from Lackey, Koo Hui-seo leisurely moved his wheelchair backwards. Kim Olim did not move until the tentacles completely disappeared behind his back and pushed his wheelchair back. The Paladin seemed to consider those things weapons. Drenching in cooling sweat, I slowly took calming, short breaths so as to not betray my true feelings.

"Well…I understand. Then, I'll get going, Lee-kyung-ssi…" Koo Hui-seo announced his departure as suddenly as he announced his arrival. Although his words were not too loud, the front door opened immediately; the big men that accompanied him earlier approached Koo Hui-seo, holding the wheelchair handles and bowing their heads politely.

"Ah, Have a safe trip…" [3] Caught up in Koo Hui-seo's pace, I rose to give my parting greetings as well. Soon, I realized what he had done, though, and quickly called after him, "W-wait a minute! But why are you taking my mug…"

"Ahh, this?" Koo Hui-seo pulled out the mug with a wriggling tentacle. Then, holding it dearly with both hands, he stuck his nose in the cup and breathed heavily, as if he were smelling the insides. "Lee-kyung-ssi's smell is so strong here… I wanted to take it as a souvenir."

What kind of bullshit is this? That only held water and tea!

I stepped back in disgust; Koo Hui-seo had even smiled while licking the edge of the mug. I couldn't even entertain restraining the man, and instead stood rigidly until the front door closed.

TL: Honestly, formalities are so interesting to talk about. There's a way that people speak in this novel that makes them unique and I hope it shows through…although I'm not too sure how successful I was with that. For example, Lee-kyung-ie is always unfalteringly polite in his speech to people whereas his inner voice isn't. Jung Garam gives no fucks to formalities. Kim Olim is robotic…Koo Hui-seo gives the bare minimum needed in formalities despite his flowery language now and then. He calls Lee-kyung "ssi" which indicates that Lee-kyung is not superior and more of an equal (Compared to how Sangyoon (the other living servant) speaks to Lee-kyung in the most formal of ways that flatter him as superior). Seo Dawon doesn't care to be formal much either, but compared to Jung Garam, uses endearments with most everyone.

Also, excuse me while I recoil in disgust at Koo Hui-seo licking that mug–I need to go clean all my cups now, lmao. Where's MC's restraining order?

Footnotes

1. That's referring to the food ribs. Not like…the anatomical ribs.
2. Radish Kimchi is a metaphorical term referring to a person who cannot fit well into a situation.
3. The original is actually just an uber formal goodbye…but I wasn't quite too sure what to put. Have a safe trip was what I landed with…

but either way, I still feel it doesn’t quite fit. Sucks, but there’s such a huge difference in formalities in the English and Korean language.

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Chapter 112

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After Koo Hui-seo came and left, the furniture we ordered arrived.

I almost lost all my energy when I saw the bill (What kind of furniture is this? How could a cabinet that didn't even seem like much cost hundreds of thousands of won?) Even more than the price, the design was a problem. The detail work was done in gold, and the splendid filigree that reminded me of medieval aristocrats made my eyes hurt.

Of course, it wasn't like the luxurious furniture didn't fit with the house. However, since I didn't know any other furniture brand except for IKEA, I thought it was too overboard. Jung Garam laughed, calling me cheap, but, when the younger insisted on placing a huge bed complete with a four-pillar frame in my bedroom, I regretted that I hadn't firmly stopped him earlier.

"What…on earth is this?"

The biggest problem was the gold chain at the head of the bed–fit for tying hands or feet.

Kim Olim also turned eyes that glared as sharply as axes onto Jung Garam, who ordered the bed. However, Jung Garam denied such accusations with innocent eyes, "I just thought that going with all the options would be best?" In other words, he claimed that since he opted into all the functionalities, he didn't know that the chain existed.

"Well, now that it's come to this, we might as well get our money's worth." Kim Olim said to me with a wicked look as she left the room.

“As long as I sleep in that bed, not one of you will enter this room” I replied, disgusted. I had no idea how much of their words were teasing or serious, but I was sure about one thing: Jung Garam’s personality was nowhere near the innocence his face portrayed.

After Jung Garam left, I was still suspicious so I asked Seo Dawon to remove the handcuffs linked to the chain, but he simply said that since he wasn’t the one to order the furniture, I should ask Jung Garam instead.

The servants all spoke as if they would listen to my every command, but, once again, I forlornly confirmed that they would do as they please. I had to settle for flinging the handcuffs behind the back of the headboard and placing them out of sight.

[Clack clack?]

“Where are you hiding?” I called out.

[Clack clack clack!]

Lackey, though, seemed to be quite fond of the extravagant furniture. In the previous house, I don’t think it had the hobby of diving underneath the bed, climbing into the cabinets, nor staring at the decorative pottery, but… the gold plating and its own sparkling reflection seemed to attract the skeleton’s attention.

“Let’s stop this and begin to clean up the dishes, alright?”

[Clack clack! Clack!]

While Lackey played hide-and-seek, it kept on trying to climb inside the cabinets, so I made it organize and clean the dishes contained inside every time. Fortunately, it must have been satisfied with this type of work; the skeleton was far too busy playing and fiddling with the dishes to tussle with the other servants, and no accidents arose.

“W-wow… Amazing…” [1] Then, after the house was cleaned, Kim Sangyoon was called over due to the business with Geum Miyoung.

When he asked about the residential district after he had heard I had moved, the Warrior was surprised after receiving the address. [Isn't that the most expensive area in the hub?] he asked.

Unduly embarrassed, I responded [It's not mine, it's Seo Dawon's], but somehow Kim Sangyoon interpreted that as the other buying the property in my name.

[Buying a house for you… As expected of Seo Dawon-nim…]

However, seeing his response, it felt as if Kim Sangyoon had misunderstood something.

Considering how the Warrior would soon become Koo Hui-seo's +1 to a party, I thought that it may be better to maintain that misconception. So, I tried to gloss over this topic, but Kim Sangyoon tried to hurriedly justify himself as if he suddenly recalled something.

[It seems as if I spoke wrongly…I'm sorry, Lee-kyung-nim]

[What? To who?]

[That…Long ago… Our talk about Ryu Hyerin and Dawon-nim…]

[Ah]

[It's just that your expression didn't look so good at the time. I just have no tact…]

I tried to send a message, saying it was okay, but I couldn't do that comfortably. Now, it would be impossible to casually ask about Ryu Hyerin

without it meaning much more. Furthermore… the fact that Ryu Hyerin and Seo Dawon used their relationship–the supposed misunderstanding–weighed heavily upon a corner of my mind.

However, regardless of my feelings, there wasn't much time left. That's why I hurried to reserve an appointment with Kim Sangyoon–just two days before the party. I pondered whether or not we needed to call Koo Hui-seo for this meeting, but Seo Dawon cut him out, saying the other wasn't needed. Therefore, Kim Sangyoon alone became the only official visitor to my new home.

"Come on in."

"I've brought some housewarming gifts. Hahaha!" King Sangyoon brought enough gargantuan boxes to cover even his large figure. Various luxury brand logos were printed upon them.

Bashful, I scratched my head and carted some of his gifts to the living room. Kim Sangyoon kept voicing his awe, trying hard to raise my mood. I don't know whether or not he was extra careful because of the Ryu Hyerin matter or because it had been a while since we'd met, but his overt caution made me feel uncomfortable.

"Thank you so much. I'll…use these well." I said.

"Oh no, it's nothing. Wow, but you have a great sense for interior design. The inside is very……" The warrior gave such awkward compliments. I just laughed because I had nothing to say to him.

Behind me, Jung Garam continued to grumble, "Look at him! Lee-kyung-ie, why can't you see that Kim Sangyoon is conscious of you."

Following, Kim Olim blatantly stared at the Warrior and muttered coldly, "I can't tell if this place is a dungeon or a house." Is she saying that Kim Sangyoon is comparable to a monster…..?

"Hi?" At that time, Seo Dawon, who had been summoned in advance, slowly walked out of the master bedroom. Even from a distance away, I

could see that Kim Sangyoon's jaw and shoulders stiffened.

"Good Morning!!" Kim Sangyoon bowed, waist folded at 90 degrees. He acted uniquely servilely even if Seo Dawon was not harsh to him first.

Such a pushover was the perfect opponent to be teased by the Mage. Without telling the Warrior to straighten his back, Seo Dawon coolly observed the Warrior and his downcast eyes. "You seem well."

"It's all thanks to Dawon-nim!"

"Me? What did I do for you?"

"Yes? Ah. I… these days… I'm training hard with the skills that Dawon-nim has given me!"

"Oh, then I can leave the tanking to you?"

"Ah….T-that's… If you leave it to me, I'll try my best!"

"Don't try; you have to do your best."

"That's right. I'll do my best!"

"And if you can't? What are you going to do then?"

"That's……"

"Stop bothering him…" I couldn't stand to see this, so I stepped up to stop the Mage; Seo Dawon snorted. Kim Sangyoon hesitatingly raised his head.

Honestly, why is Seo Dawon acting like such an old man to Kim Sangyoon, someone older than him?

However, Seo Dawon, disregarding what I said, encroached into Kim Sangyoon's space and ordered him to manifest and reveal his status window to party members. He intended to see for himself whether or not Kim Sangyoon was simply paying lip service or if he trained hard.

“You did practice some, didn’t you? About four hours a day?”

“Yes. About three to four hours consistently… It was a priority for me to raise skill proficiency at the [Hub’s] training programs.”

“That’ll be a bit different from the real thing, though. With this amount of training, you’ll die immediately in the next instance dungeon.” [2]

“……”

Though the Mage was quite cold-hearted, Kim Sangyoon didn’t seem upset. He just maintained a submissive look in his eyes that seemed to indicate that the Warrior would follow whatever Seo Dawon said.

I wondered why Kim Sangyoon put so much confidence in Seo Dawon despite the difficult time the other put him through. However, looking at Kim Sangyoon’s status window that Seo Dawon placed before our eyes, I couldn’t help but speculate. Based on his increased skill proficiency and raised attack specs, Kim Sangyoon was placing all his expectations on the high-level skills the Mage gave him.

“Lee-kyung-ah, help me for a moment,” Seo Dawon said.

“Ah, mmhmm….”

At Seo Dawon’s call, I stood in front of Kim Sangyoon. The Warrior was fine when I was at a distance, but, as I got closer, Kim Sangyoon displayed a reluctance that he didn’t have when he was with Seo Dawon. From how he glanced at my hand, it seemed like he was still saddled with some trauma regarding the [reward] and [punishment].

Even so, how could he be more reticent with me compared to Seo Dawon…… I teared up a bit, but I understood Kim Sangyoon’s feelings and stayed silent.

TL: I'll probably do a bonus chapter + normal release tomorrow or the day after!

Footnotes

1. = Killer/amazing/awesome etc. Just a phrase to show your awe.
2. = Abbreviation for Instance Dungeon, used commonly in World of Warcraft. Instance Dungeons are personalized dungeons to your team–you won't come across other parties.

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Chapter 113

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Seo Dawon double-checked, “After using it for 3 to 4 hours, you’re exhausted. Is that right?”

“That’s correct. Actually, I wanted to do more, but… Maybe due to my lack of concentration after a while, but the rate of improvement seemed to falter.”

Above the mid-high rank, the rate of increasing the skill’s rank greatly decreased. This change in growth pace was often called the [High Level Slump]; Kim Sangyoon had reached this section.

“Hmm…” Seo Dawon listened to Kim Sangyoon with a careful expression and, soon, reached out his hand to him. A jelly-like golden mass fell genty from his fingertips and plopped onto the floor. It looked simultaneously like a constant flow of water droplets and slime.

The issue was that within seconds these unidentifiable objects amalgamated into a great shiny mass and stuck onto the floor. The way the light bounced off its surface–its holographic sheen–the mass looked a bit like pudding. I had the sense that Kim Sangyoon did not know what was going on.

“Use your skill here.”

“…..What? Here?”

“Yep. As hard as you can.”

Abruptly, Seo Dawon asked Kim Sangyoon to use his skill at his strongest output against that strange object. Kim Sangyoon seemed somewhat bewildered but did not hesitate to take his sword out of his inventory.

It was Berserker. Unwilling to be in his way, I retreated a couple of steps.

“Haaahhp!”

Shlorp–

Kim Sangyoon’s attack… couldn’t cut through that pudding, although his blade was deeply embedded in its midst.

“Ugh….!”

In addition, though he went red-faced trying to pull Berserker out, the pudding only slightly vibrated, not releasing the sword. Even his left hand was beginning to be captured in the pudding, and Kim Sangyoon tried to flounder at the wrist, trying to ensure that his hand, too, would not be locked there. “It…It won’t get out…”

“I guess Lee-kyung-ie needs to help out?” Seo Dawon gave me a wink.

I nodded and went to pull at Kim Sangyoon’s arm. The warrior stayed calm when I went to grab at his arm, but as soon as I began to pull, he suddenly pushed me away. I had no choice but to fall from the force. Frustrated and a bit bewildered, I turned to Kim Sangyoon, “What are you……”

However, when our eyes met, my protest died–in that short moment, Kim Sangyoon’s face turned unusually red.

What on earth? No way, was the [reward] triggered again? But! I was just trying to help by grabbing his arm, though…

“No, I…!” I was about to say it was all a misunderstanding, but Kim Sangyoon was struggling, no longer listening to me.

Slowly, but persistently, he tore at the pudding that was holding onto his hand. With a great scream, Kim Sangyoon finally escaped, “Gaaahh!”

He looked like a monster with his eyes rolled up. Only when Kim Sangyoon recklessly dug himself out of the pudding and escaped did Seo Dawon flick his finger. The golden pudding debris that was splattered all over the living room melted away. As expected, was Seo Dawon the cause of Kim Sangyoon’s abrupt recklessness?

“Gasp, gasp…….”

“Isn’t it effective? Just now, your power exceeded your current limits.” Seo Dawon spoke casually to Kim Sangyoon, who couldn’t even speak in between his gasps. Though he looked as if he was about to cry, the Warrior alternated between trembling and nodding at the Mage.

Seo Dawon patiently observed the Warrior; at the Warrior’s nods–with an all-knowing expression–he offered a small stone placed upon his palm. “Eat it. It’ll help.”

“……” In response, Kim Sangyoon closed his eyes and swallowed the stone he received.

In the end, I was once again the only one who couldn’t follow the sequence of events. However, it was a bit difficult to ask for clarification from Seo Dawon in front of Kim Sangyoon.

Because, when Kim Sangyoon looked at me, I was sure I saw hints of resentment in his expression. Just like he thought I was somehow involved in the chaos that just happened. As if Seo Dawon and I had caused all this–that Seo Dawon somehow induced him to feel this way…

‘Damn. Seo Dawon, why do you never explain anything to me first…’ I had many complaints, but I endured for now.

After calming down, Kim Sangyoon sat down on the sofa; I tried to adopt Seo Dawon’s despicable demeanor–that was to say, I tried to pretend

I was careless and unmoved. “In two days, Sangyoon-ssi and someone named Koo Hui-seo will attend a party together.”

“…I understand.”

I explained why I had called the Warrior over today.

Kim Sangyoon looked as if his soul escaped his body; when he noticed me observing him, he closed his tear-filled eyes and opened them again after masking his emotions. After a short silence, he tried to make a show of recovering his calm and cleared his throat. “Cough, cough… By the way… Why did Koo Hui-seo agree to have me accompany him as his partner?”

This time, Seo Dawon answered that question, “When we went to the hospital to rescue him, you came along, right?”

“That’s…true.”

“Unfortunately, Koo Hui-seo was discharged the day before you finished your small vacation at the VIP annex. Afterwards, Koo Hui-seo suddenly became guildmaster of the Red Dragon Guild. You’re presented as his plus 1 in his first official event as a guild master. This…What do you think other people will assume?”

“That I…helped Koo Hui-seo-ssi to become a guildmaster?”

“That’s right. And that’s true, to an extent.”

“…….”

In other words, he meant for others to assume that Kim Sangyoon was Koo Hui-seo’s subordinate. Continuing on from the clues laid behind at the hospital, the Warrior was to continue to be a tempting false bait. Kim Sangyoon also seemed to notice his underlying intent; his nodding face became more serious.

“I’m not too sure about Moon Issak, but I’m certain that Bae Jaemin will attend. So, it would be better for you to go than Lee-kyung-ie,” the Mage said.

There was no way Bae Jaemin, [HaHae]'s guildmaster, would not attend such an important party. At these words, Kim Sangyoon looked as if he finally understood all the strands of information thrown at him.

He agreed to the plan, though he asked something that must have been on his mind for a long while, "By the way… What happened to Koo Kyungman? Shouldn't I also know the clear narrative here?"

"It's better for you not to know," Seo Dawon responded.

"They'll find it weird for me not to know, though. Especially… Bae Jaemin. You said that person is coming to the party."

"Of course not. If you said you don't know, do you think Bae Jaemin would naively believe you?"

Under these circumstances, Kim Sangyoon would be outed as Koo Hui-seo's associate or subordinate. Even if Kim Sangyoon were to claim he honestly had no idea, everyone would consider that a lie–they would just believe that he had no desire to tell the truth. Kim Sangyoon nodded as if he understood, but he could not hide his disappointment.

Listening to their conversation, I recalled and tried to erase the memory of Koo Kyungman's last moments from my mind. However, Kim Sangyoon noticed my expression and roughly seemed to guess at his grisly end, "Well…I see that there's no chance of Koo Kyungman crawling back."

"……"

"Then, how should I treat this Koo Hui-seo? My collaborator? Or perhaps I've been blackmailed by him….."

"He's under a similar contract like yours."

"Mmm……"

"Even so, don't take liberties with him. Koo Hui-seo has some peculiarly awful tastes."

“What do you mean to by that…” Kim Sangyoon shook his hands in front of him, denying the accusation.

It honestly felt strangely unpleasant to hear it described as Koo Hui-seo’s ‘awful taste.’ Of course, Seo Dawon may very well have been describing the torture he inflicted upon his own brother, but, since Koo Hui-seo newfound obsession was me, I felt that those words were taking a dig at me.

‘No, stop digging a pit for yourself……’ Of course, immediately afterwards, I realized that my thought process wasn’t logical.

I had a long-held habit of entertaining the delusion that those I liked were actually looking down upon me. This habit perhaps formed from the influence of a long-lasting old crush on someone I had adored in my adolescence. And, I had originally been interested in Seo Dawon because he was so similar to that person in mannerisms and, to a lesser extent, in appearance as well.

‘Now that I think about it…He became a User too.’

The name that had long been buried in the depths of my consciousness rose to the surface, unbidden; but, Kim Sangyoon’s quiet grumbling voice broke me from reminiscing.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Soon enough, MC and ML should have a long-needed conversation about Seo Dawon’s way of planning things.

Also, wonder what Seo Dawon would think if MC said that he originally started having a crush bc it reminded him of an old flame O.O

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“So, simply put, I have to roughly perform as Koo Hui-seo’s subordinate. Also, I should be careful around Koo Hui-seo.” Kim Sangyoon said.

“I guess you really do use what’s above your shoulders,” the Mage drawled.

“…… I’m large, so you may see me as a muscled fool, but I’m truly not a stupid person you know?”

After organizing future plans, Kim Sangyoon picked up the cookie left on the table and began eating it.

He used to only be able to tremble in front of the Mage, but he seems to have gotten used to his presence with time. It felt as if with every interaction, Sangyoon was beginning to push his boundaries with some sassiness. The Warrior sent furtive glances, perhaps to judge if the Mage would allow such grumbling to stand.

Like that, Kim Sangyoon stole a glance at Seo Dawon and cleared his throat before delivering some new information, “Actually, I received a call from Bae Jaemin.”

“He wants to meet?”

“Ah, yes. Maybe his talks with Moon Issak went well; he wants to buy me a drink…”

“Hmmm….”

“For the first time, Bae Jaemin offered to send a link to his messaging app that his party members had. I refused for now, but he asked if I did so because of Ahn Joosung. Since I wasn’t answering, he further explained that the link had nothing to do with guild matters and was, instead, a personal line. So, I didn’t have to be conscious of Ahn Joosung.”

For Bae Jaemin to say such things, it meant that Kim Sangyoon probably scored many points in his books. He seemed to believe that the Warrior had cleared the path for him to connect with Moon Issak. It was good that we weren’t caught, but I was still tense–only time would tell if it was wise to continue to be entangled with the Priest.

Seo Dawon didn’t immediately bark out orders and instead closed his lips temporarily. Then, Kim Sangyoon began to express his opinions in a stuttering and cautious tone, “I believe he’ll be suspicious if I refuse too much.”

“It smells like a test.”

“That’s possible. By the way, Bae Jaemin continues to inquire about Lee-kyung-nim often. Saying that there’s no contact from him. He asks if I’m in touch with him.”

I made a face, unable to hide my emotions, at those words.

Because of Koo Hui-seo, I completely forgot, but Bae Jaemin was also another opponent who seemed unassuming on the outside but was completely absurd on the inside. [1] Bae Jaemin may not know that whatever happened in the VIP annex had something to do with our presence. ‘Honestly, the only thing that he wouldn’t be suspicious of is the lie that I’m somehow Kim Sangyoon or Moon Issak’s subordinate…’

He was a crafty man, pretending to be relaxed and carefree though he was sure to question everything. If it weren’t for Kim Sangyoon, I may have overlooked Bae Jaemin’s continual interest in me.

“If you’re confident in your ability to fool him, go ahead and contact Bae Jaemin. That is, if you’re confident that you won’t reveal mine and Lee-kyung-ie’s relationship.”

“I understand.”

When all was said and done, Seo Dawon finally allowed Kim Sangyoon to act as a spy.

I had thought about offering Kim Sangyoon an invitation to eat his meal with us, but Seo Dawon’s summon time limit was soon approaching. Regretfully, I sent the Warrior on his way, though the Warrior did not particularly seem to care about the discourtesy.

“It’s a relief that Kim Sangyoon and Koo Hui-seo are able to draw so much attention, externally.” Seo Dawon said.

“Yeah?”

“Mhmm. First of all, those two are more likely culprits than you. That won’t last long, though.”

After seeing Kim Sangyoon off, we moved to the living room to discuss future plans. Seo Dawon shone a beam projector onto the white wall, and Kim Olim shared pictures from the laptop.

Inside that picture was a view of a model-like woman dismounting a private jet. If my memory serves me well, then that should be Ryu Hyerin of [Opera].

“It’s been reported that she returned home yesterday. That probably means she intends to attend the party.”

“……”

“Long ago, Ryu Hyerin and Lim Jisoo were not fond of each other; however, that private plane that she’s riding now is owned by the private company where Lim Ji-soo serves as director. The final person settling the rental contract is also Lim Jisoo.”

It seems that the two had gotten close through the ordeal in the [Tower of Command] or the two had secretly kindled an agreeable relationship behind Seo Dawon's back.

Even the face of the man following Ryu Hyerin–her bodyguard perhaps?–was familiar: the man with a large diagonal scar across his face from Jung Garam's memory. Furthermore, we had come across him once during our trip to the department store.

"How about kidnapping that bastard and killing him first? In anycase, 'revenge' will raise Choi Lee-kyung's level." Excited, Jung Garam threw a dagger into the center of the man's face. Of course, though, the only thing that was actually pierced was the white wall.

Seo Dawon coldly cut Jung Garam's request short, "We can't. If his spear is truly [Gae Bolg], then our odds are low."

"What? Hyung, do you think I'm gonna lose?" With those words, Jung Garam stormed up to his feet from the newly purchased sofa.

"The maximum time Lee-kyung-ie can summon his servants at his level is still about 33 minutes. We'd need to defeat him within those 30 minutes, but, if the fight is prolonged or support doesn't arrive, a one-on-one match would definitely be too dangerous. It's not you–Choi Lee-kyung will be the one in danger."

"……"

"And that guy, Park Hoseok, has a quite timid personality compared to his large figure." Seo Dawon brought up a piece of data on the projector screen, saying how he was overly cautious about kidnapping attempts and tended to flee from one-on-one scenarios.

The new data that emerged on the wall was a list of how much each of our various revenge targets spent on security annually. Park Hoseok seems to have spent a decent chunk of money on security, facility inspections, and insurance.

‘Twice as much as Bae Jaemin……’

Bae Jaemin could almost be considered a celebrity, so it was understandable that he spent a lot of money on security and insurance compared to the others. It was certainly unexpected that the large spear wielder would spend twice as much money as Bae Jaemin even without the incentive of fame.

I chuckled inwardly, when I saw his large manly figure. How did such a timid man confront Jung Garam with ease? How confident was he that he could win the fight? [2] Just how long had the treachery been running underfoot for such a coward to muster the courage to carry a knife of treachery.

But, before I could fall deeply into this line of thought,Kim Olim continued in a chilling voice, “There’s a reason for him to be so cautious. Park Hoseok got married 2 years before the [Tower of Command] incident. He was never so prominent before the [Tower of Command], but afterwards, when a few members of the guild were exterminated, he was scouted by the [Red Dragons] to be one of their executives in return for an extraordinary salary. Now, he’s moved to [HaHae] for 10 times that amount.”

“……”

“A year after marriage, twins were born in his family. Again, the year after, another child. He’s the father of three daughters now.” With Kim Olim’s explanation, the beam projector showcased the picture of Park Hoseok as the successful head of his family–a picture of three still-young daughters playing in the garden-like yard of a large mansion.”

Looking at such a harmonious and beautiful picture, I involuntarily recalled a certain stench: the smell of meat roasting and burning from explosives.

“Mmmph…” I covered my mouth, face pale.

Actually, intense flashbacks or sensations from the memory playbacks happened occasionally; most appeared as nightmares during sleep or vague tinnitus while showering. I…could handle that much.

But, how should I put this…It felt like I was dragged back to that place–next to Jung Garam's dying body? That vivid stench wafting into the air……

"Lee-kyung-ah."

"What's going on? Are you okay?"

"Choi Lee-kyung?"

The servants noticed that I wasn't in a good state. I shook my hands at them, but they all ran to my side, removing my fingers and wrapping their own around my pale face.

At the front, Jung Garam even kneeled down to look up at my face. He asked, blinking his red eyes, "Why are you trembling all of a sudden?"

"I-I'm okay…"

"Are you like this because of Park Hoseok?" Seo Dawon asked.

He questioned in a soft tone–one couldn't mistake it for interrogation. I shook my head.

However, Seo Dawon asked again, "Is it because of the memory playback?"

I missed the timing to deny him because I didn't think that Seo Dawon would have noticed that much. The Mage pulled my head into his chest as soon as it looked as if the effects were gone; I flung myself into his embrace as if I were collapsing.

TL: Thanks Lewe, this bonus chapter is for you <3

I wonder what you guys will think about Park Hoseok and the revenge coming his way. Thus far (Koo Kyungman) the revenge targets have been relatively simple, morally. Though we're all pretty horrified by what happened to him, I think most of us thought he deserved some retribution. But, it's different when you think about how revenge targets have family… three young daughters.

Footnotes

1. = fool/unassuming outside and insane inside. I don't know if there's 1 word that really describes it haha
2. MC…Bae Jaemin was there….

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Chapter 115

Chapter 115

“I’m alri–…!” Of course I was embarrassed. After all, this was Seo Dawon.

However, Seo Dawon did not push me away and, instead, held onto me, covering my eyes with his own hands. As soon as he did that, I felt strangely tired; at the same time, I could not keep my balance due to the strength that was put into my tense shoulders.

No longer able to resist, I weakly collapsed completely into the Mage’s arms, only able to breathe shallowly. Then, I managed to muster my vigilance and distrust to say, “Seo Dawon, what have you done to me……”

[Clack, clack!]

Simultaneously, I heard Lackey rushing towards Seo Dawon. However, inducing some anxiety, the sound of the skeleton running cut off. My ears felt deafened; I felt that Seo Dawon had done something.

“Wha….What are you doing!”

“Don’t be afraid. I just want you to get some rest–some sleep.”

“Why……”

“You wouldn’t know, but your body’s reached its limits. I know you hate that I’m intervening like this…..”

“Limit…….?”

“First of all, sleep tight. You haven’t slept 20 hours this week.”

…I haven’t slept for more than 20 hours this week?

I don’t remember that. I shook my head to deny it, but, as soon as Seo Dawon started stroking my head slowly, I felt the embrace of sleep enveloping my body.

I identified the sensation overwhelmingly–painfully–rushing over me as ‘drowsiness.’ Blinking, struggling with the deluge of sleepiness, I bit my tongue until it began to numb–out of reluctance to fall asleep like this. “I, I’m……. I’ve never had a hard time sleeping…… I’ve never asked you to solve this, either…”

I kept yawning, regardless of my will, during the entirety of that short sentence. My voice gradually grew languid, like a sinking ship.

However, Seo Dawon never stopped stroking my head, and Jung Garam, who was holding my knee, slowly pulled on my feet. As if he were trying to move me into a lying position.

Then, he said something shocking. “It seems like Choi Lee-kyung doesn’t remember how he tossed and turned, crying all night and asking hyung to put him to sleep?”

“……” Seo Dawon didn’t answer, but his silence was enough.

I wanted to ask them about what they said, but I couldn’t move my lips because of the vertigo that settled into me. Soon I was dazed by the sensation of drifting off into sleep.

Kim Olim said, “I don’t think he’ll last long at this rate. Won’t it get worse if we resurrect the others? Hnnn…Is that why you all so seriously argued to sleep with him? I thought he’d remember a little bit of all this.”

“It’s going to get worse.” Seo Dawon spoke, tone brokering little emotion.

Simultaneously, I felt someone's cold touch holding my neck. That hand gently touched the back of my neck, as if it were painting something on my skin.

"When I signed the contract, it was frankly offensive, but……"

That touch must belong to Kim Olim; my contract seal with her was inscribed on the back of our necks. Kim Olim continued, still firmly pressing down at that spot, "As soon as I saw the seal, I became satisfied."

"……"

"……"

"Most definitely, Choi Lee-kyung is…..Well, you all know better than me what I'm talking about."

"Mm, Well… You're talking about 'that feeling.'"

And, as if stimulated by Kim Olim's words, I felt another touch on my thighs.

I didn't have the energy to open my mouth, so I could only flinch my legs; however, Jung Garam rubbed his lips alongside my thigh and gently bit with the blunt side of his teeth. He did not bite for long, but the emotions held within that gesture were too heavy to pass off as a joke.

However, Jung Garam quickly removed his lips and replied in a cheery tone, "It's like I want to consume… The desire to indulge in some… inclinations. You're talking about that sort of feeling, right? But, then Choi Lee-kyung will die."

Of course, the content was nowhere near cheery.

I was appalled, but their voices sounded gradually more and more distant against my will. More and more, I began to hear their conversation in scattered pieces.

"So, Seo Dawon, explain. Your contract……isn't that right?"

“I’m just following the characteristics of the undead. Hunger and Obsession. If it gets worse, I suppose I’ll want to do harm.”

“Then, hyung……”

“No. The contract will be carried out as it is. Whatever misunderstanding Choi Lee-kyung has, it….. after all.”

“….Choi Lee-kyung, like that……Does he know?”

“You can’t let him know. He’ll be wary of us.”

It was too much. Just before my consciousness faded, Seo Dawon finally took off the hand he had that cupped my face.

However, I was already unable to open my eyes. Far from being able to see the servants, I could no longer hear them as well. The only thing left, at the end, was the sense of the Mage gently stroking my head…

Soon, I lost my wakefulness.

* * *

“I……When did I fall asleep?”

“After our meeting, you had a glass of wine during the meal and went straight to bed.” Seo Dawon smiled and pulled my bangs back. He held a mysterious expression that seemed to exude cuteness. Somehow my face felt hot, and I rose from my seat, avoiding his gaze and scratching my head.

I didn’t know when I fell asleep, but, as soon as I opened my eyes, Lackey was held in my embrace, eyes closed, and I locked eyes with Seo Dawon.

My head ached as soon as I made eye contact with the Mage. He said that it was because I drank wine.

‘I drank wine yesterday?’

I think I drank some? I wasn’t the type to enjoy alcohol, but I heard that Kim Sangyoon brought some wine among his housewarming gifts.

‘By the way, it seems I have a bad hangover?’

I’ve never had such a hard time with alcohol before, though.. Rather than a hangover, the pain was enough as if my head had been hit several times with a hammer.

Seo Dawon’s expression also seemed unusual. He picked up a cup from the bedside table and handed it to me as soon as I made a grimace. I took a few sips, thinking it was water, but paused when I found some lemon-flavored unknown substance shining, round, and melting in the liquid.

“It’s a dissolvable foaming vitamin.”

“No wonder, I thought it tasted a bit weird……”

“You won’t take it because it tastes bad?”

“I’m not fond of the sour taste…..”

“Really? Then next time I’ll make it strawberry flavored.”

“……I’d like it if you’d stop treating me like a child.”

“Haha. Don’t force yourself to eat if it tastes bad.”

How on earth do you think that that face encourages me to stop drinking if it doesn’t fit my tastes? It’s an expression that makes it seem like you’re looking down on me.

I frowned but eventually drank all the liquid he had given me–even the melted powder left from the dissolvable vitamin. IT was shiny, gold, and

prickly, like grains of sand, but that didn’t bother me too much since it melted immediately when it touched my tongue. I don’t know if the vitamins took effect, but my splitting headache vanished in an instant.

“Choi Lee-kyung….. You’re making my back sore.”

“W-What are you talking about?”

However, as soon as I finished drinking, the door to the master bedroom suddenly opened and Jung Garam stormed in, holding a pillow. Once again, he was saying something strange.

I tried to get up from my seat, but I felt again the throbbing headache that I had thought disappeared. I collapsed back onto the bed when Jung Garam rushed in with a pillow.

Kim Olim, who followed Jung Garam into the room afterwards with her arms folded, saw Jung Garam entangled within my arms and stared fiercely at me. Damn it, I didn’t hug him on purpose! We just stuck together somehow……!

“Hey! What are you doing!” I shouted.

“You kicked me out of the bed, so I slept on the floor.”

“You could pick any other room and purchase a new bed!” I said, as I tried to shake off the heavy Jung Garam; Seo Dawon dragged him off first. I looked at him because he usually only stood on the sidelines, watching me suffer.

Seo Dawon opened his mouth as soon as he dropped Jung Garam, “Lee-kyung-ie, you must be exhausted today. You’ve been fretful all night, and you barely calmed down……”

“W-What are you talking about?!”

“Hm. I can do it too–that much.” Jung Garam said. [1]

“Choi Lee-kyung. Aren’t you ashamed of causing so much trouble? Next time, I should really be here…”

“Come on. I don’t know why Kim Olim noona has to act like she despises him and sneaks herself in.”

I’m about to go insane. After drinking yesterday, did I do something wrong?

However, I couldn’t tell exactly because Seo Dawon’s voice was full of teasing as always. But, something about their reactions felt too strange to simply pass as a cheap joke.

Weirdly, when Seo Dawon and my eyes met, my heartbeat skyrocketed. I felt a bit bitter, since I was still conscious of him, but apparently I’ve been drinking to the point that my film cut off [2]

‘No way, did I ask about how he felt when I didn’t command him a while ago……?’

Nervously, I worried that I created another dark stain in our history.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Things got a bit dark didn’t it? I can’t wait for the inevitable fallout when all secrets are aired out into the open. I can understand the servants’ desire to spare Lee-kyung the knowledge of his…night terrors and breakdowns, both for their own and Lee-kyung’s benefit, but MC definitely won’t be pleased. And judging by what they said about Undead characteristics…no wonder Necromancers have had it hard.

…But also Jung Garam, smh, biting people’s inner thighs without first taking them out to dinner.

Footnotes

1. This is a rather vague sentence from Jung Garam, but it’s essentially implied that Jung Garam is saying “I can make you sleep too!”
2. Poetic way of saying “I blacked out drunk”

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Chapter 116

Chapter 116

"About yesterday……" Later, I exited the room as if I were running away and took a shower. Leaving the bathroom, I saw Seo Dawon cooking in the kitchen.

'Did he gain a hobby in cooking?'

I was a bit ashamed [1] since I was the only one in this household that could eat the dishes he made, but I sat at the table without showing an ounce of remorse. If I responded to every single thing like this, it might be a larger burden (or be a target of ridicule).

"So, about yesterday……" I cut the omelet Seo Dawon made into pieces with a fork. I felt awkward eating without talking, so I talked.

The problem was, as soon as I spoke, Kim Olim and Jung Garam, who were originally making conversation amongst each other, turned their attentions onto me. I understood that they had no choice but to be sensitive about whatever left my mouth…Honestly, this damn system was causing me too much trouble.

"Yesterday?" Seo Dawon asked, finishing setting the table by placing Caprese salad, tomato and cheese slices alternating, on the table.

I just shook my head, feeling piercing gazes burned holes into the back of my head. It was far too embarrassing now to ask if I'd done anything strange yesterday.

However, since I've already brought it up, I decided to, stuttering slightly, continue to ask, "It's just that……Since you said I drank a lot of wine yesterday….. I wasn't too drunk, was I…?"

"You just slept peacefully?" Seo Dawon answered, as if he knew what I was worried about.

Haah, I guess if I've done anything that's worth becoming a dark stain in my past then there's no way that frivolous Jung Garam wouldn't have said anything about it. Kim Olim, who despised evil-attribute Users, would have made some comment about how they also cause inconveniences as well.

"Your head doesn't hurt?"

"Huh? Um yeah…It hurt for a bit in the morning, but it's okay now."

"If it hurts again or something else happens, tell me."

"……" Still, the strange feeling that surrounded us did not disappear easily. For example: Seo Dawon's kind attitude. He usually spoke gently, but I didn't think that the distance between us narrowed that easily… But today, Seo Dawon didn't joke around and instead seemed genuinely concerned about my body.

'As expected, did I say some nonsense yesterday? Or did I cry…..'

My most annoying involuntary reaction was crying; I don't know by which mechanism my tear ducts were controlled, but, if I were to be sad, embarrassed, angry, or scared, the nerves would send the signals to 'Let it pour! Let it pour!' So, I always clenched the muscles there whenever I felt like I was about to get emotional.

I touched my eyelids in the shower; I don't think I cried much yesterday, because they weren't quite swollen… Perhaps I was overly concerned about Seo Dawon's behavior because I suddenly thought about 'him' yesterday.

Han Ki-seok.

Honestly, Han Ki-seok and Seo Dawon were not objectively similar in looks. Han Ki-seok was a popular guy, but it was a bit hard to compare his face with Seo Dawon….

Come to think of it, Han Ki-seok and Seo Dawon had little in common. To put it simply, Han Ki-seok was a bully. He barrelled into my heart like a ghost in my darkest moments, and, after learning how much I loved him, he lost interest, mocked me, and disappeared.

Though Seo Dawon didn't feel like the type to deceive me like the other, I was hiding because somehow I felt like the Han Ki-seok incident would happen again.

My appearance itself, back when I liked Han Kiseok, could be considered dark blunder years. [2] Someone who wore their crush on their sleeves– someone who would be perfect for Han Ki-seok to play around with.

That bastard said this often: you're too easy to read.

Back then, I thought it was merely sweet teasing. To be honest, more than Han Ki-seok, I hated myself whose brain was nothing more than a flowerbed. No–I truly hated Han Ki-seok made me that way. If he had not become a User, I would have lived, swayed by his whims, until university.

Han Kiseok became a User in high school and transferred to the Hub. Just before he left, I found out just exactly what that bastard thought of me.

I was shocked, but it wasn't like I didn't suspect it. Even if one is a fool, you'll start to have a hunch after several cycles of hope and torture hit you in the back of the head. Though, fuck, to have that hunch proven right…..

Afterwards, I consciously kept away from news about Han Ki-seok. I was reminded of him briefly when I became a User, but I couldn't afford to spare him the mental energy because, after choosing to be a Necromancer, I had to work so hard.

As I grew older, I became mature enough to think 'how crazy must I have been to be so infatuated with him.' And, I wasn't stupid enough to contact

him after becoming a User.

“What are you thinking so hard about?” Seo Dawon asked.

“Just, well…… An old friend?”

“Really? I thought you were angry because the omelet tasted awful.

“……Huh? Ah! It’s not that!”

Unconsciously, while thinking of Han Ki-seok, I had been hacking and mutilating the omelet with my fork. I hurriedly apologized and put a piece in my mouth. Worried that I looked too stern or angry, I carefully watched his reactions.

Seo Dawon watched me, his expression betraying his amusement, and eventually asked a question I had been dreading, “Friend, who?”

“J-Just…… Someone I knew long ago.”

“What’s his name?”

“……Would you even know if I told you.”

Seo Dawon became silent then.

It’s only that he didn’t immediately respond, but for some reason, that brief silence tugged at me. I think I answered too snappily. He probably asked without any deeper meaning, but the embarrassment of being so blatantly prodded at made the answer flutter out of my lips.

Eventually, I sighed, “He’s called Han Ki-seok. We both…come from the same high school.”

“You must have been close?”

“What? No! He’s a total jerk, that’s……” Jumping to my feet, I corrected Seo Dawon’s misunderstanding.

Seo Dawon nodded absentmindedly. I could see that he didn't quite believe me.

I inwardly swore at Han Ki-seok–I felt like I was making excuses because of him. "Han Ki-seok was a bully! Everyday he would ask to borrow money, or to buy him something, or to borrow something…… And then he never paid back…"

"To you?"

"Mhmm……"

Frankly speaking, I was deeply ashamed, but it was all true. When Han Ki-seok asked to hang out, I was dragged into his orbit and donated my already-small allowance to him.

It wasn't school violence [3] , I did everything on my own. Despite knowing that Han Ki-seok was the son of a rich family whose standard of living was far beyond mine. It's amazing, thinking back, how I knew all that and did all that he asked without refusing even once. I was being robbed, but it didn't feel that way. I had just wanted to become someone worthy of him–I had just appreciated that he had spared me a moment of his time.

"Choi Lee-kyung… Did you go around getting ripped off?"

"I don't suppose you were being beaten? They still beat you up after seeing your hamster-like face?"

"What do you mean hamster! And, I didn't get hit. It's just… just… I had thought of him as a friend…"

Of course, this conversation caught Jung Garam and Kim Olim's attention.

"Ha!" Jung Garam, doubting me and with sparks in his eyes, muttered "Han Ki-seok…." in a meaningful tone. I felt a bloodlust so thick that if Han Ki-seok were in front of us, he would have been ripped apart, piece by piece.

And, Kim Olim had her arms folded over her chest as if she were unaffected, but she searched for [Han Ki-seok] in my contact list after stealing, at an incredible speed, my cell phone that I had left on the table.

Of course, I had not saved his contact. But, more than anyone else, it was ridiculous to see the Paladin acting so slyly. And…it was a bit funny?

“I said it’s fine…” To see the servants caring for me like that… I was touched and couldn’t stop sniffling.

Well, there were definitely times when Han Ki-seok encouraged me emotionally as well. They could just call me a pushover and move on from this chapter of my story.

“What’s that friend doing nowadays?” Seo Dawon asked.

“I-I don’t know… I haven’t kept in touch.”

“You don’t contact other people that much either. And many people don’t contact you as well.” Seo Dawon’s response felt like a prickly thorn in my sore spots.

I wondered if he acted like that because of my abrupt answer earlier, and I couldn’t hide my emotional state as I rushed to add, “What do you mean people don’t call me! It’s just… There were a lot before, but they’ve stopped since I stopped replying–because I was too busy…”

“Choi Lee-kyung doesn’t seem to have any friends.”

“Is that why you were robbed of your wealth: paying for friends? Necromancer… that’s not how you made friends.”

“What are you saying! I…only did that with Han Ki-seok; I have many friends!”

TL: We'll learn more about Han Kiseok next chapter :3

Footnotes

1. is like feeling shame because you've caused some burden to others. Or you feel that something is being done for an insignificant matter, etc.
2. = black history. Aka something you want to forget. Something cringy/shameful etc
3. = School violence, literally. Bullying, in Korea, often has many different labels and is called School Violence. Bullying doesn't really cover something like teasing etc. It's more insidious than that–sexual violence, actual violence, isolation until everyone in the school pretends like you don't exist. Total reputation destruction. Selling you to a gang etc… That's why Bullying is such a huge deal in Korea and in Korean media.

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Chapter 117

Chapter 117

After I shouted that I had a lot of friends, there were about 3 minutes of silence. I realized, at that moment, that a wealth of friends was the stupidest thing to claim.

The three servants, who must have had much to say, closed their mouths as if they tasted something sour; I felt embarrassed and angry.

Eventually, I bowed my head and muttered, “After becoming a User… I couldn’t keep in contact because I was too busy.”

However, I felt a bit uncomfortable even as I said that.

Though I wasn’t in quite a comfortable environment, as soon as I became a user, my classmates soon repaid their alcohol debts to me and called me to outings. Many people also bought me meals to congratulate me.

I honestly wondered if I could call him a ‘friend,’ but I didn’t want to admit that I was a loser. So, I swallowed the truthful words that threatened to spill out. Instead, I rambled about my honest feelings about Ki-seok as if I were justifying myself. “Also Han Ki-seok… Honestly, it’s true that I’m a pushover.”

“……”

“But that guy, he wasn’t bad every day. He treated me well sometimes.” As I spoke, I naturally remembered the past.

Han Ki-seok was my seatmate when I transferred into the school. When everything was unfamiliar and I felt anxious, he offered to eat lunch together and said that his home was in the same direction as mine and walked to and fro with me.

In addition, at that time my parents used to yell at each other that they wanted to divorce; I had to run out and escape because I had no desire to hear their marital discord–their shouting and swears–in that small house.

My parents, who both contributed to the household income, usually came back late at night and quarreled until dawn. So, I was used to walking the streets at night alone. Then, Han Ki-seok found me sitting on a park bench.

At that time, we weren't even close, but Han Ki-seok called out to me without passing by, asking what I was doing and leading me to a convenience store. "Let's eat some ramen," he said. Like that, I played around with him until 2 am until I could return to a tranquil house.

And the next day, I called Han Ki-seok in the middle of the night without any expectations. When I asked, 'Do you want to hang?' he simply responded, 'What do you want to do?' And, when I mumbled and couldn't answer easily, he didn't interrogate me and still came out candidly. Like the day before, we went to the convenience store and ate an onigiri and played games for an hour in a PC room [1] owned by an older boy he knew.

The next day–the day after that–from then on, Han Ki-seok came out without another word whenever I called him. He stayed with me for hours until we parted at around 2 to 3 am.

It was natural to become obsessed with someone who would, during your darkest moments, come to the playground in front of your house without a hint of dissatisfaction and stay with you until dawn. Now that I think about it, I couldn't tell if I truly liked Han Ki-seok or whether I was too lonely to endure life without him.

However, after I started to think I wanted to date him and he noticed those feelings, it became a problem. Han Ki-seok was always quick-witted

so he had already guessed how I felt even though I hadn’t confessed. I had found out later when I happened to eavesdrop on him.

It was a real shock at the time. There were times when Han Ki-seok was overly harsh to me, but to find out that was because he knew I liked him…

So, I blamed myself a lot afterwards. I criticized myself–what a fool who made the only friend I had uncomfortable with my unwanted feelings. To be honest, later I realized that Han Ki-seok, who could have just rejected me, was worse. But, back then, I had believed it was all my fault.

I couldn’t cut off relations with Han Ki-seok right after I found out that he actually disliked me. I couldn’t even show my hurt in front of the other, and he was free to swing me around as much as he wished whenever he called me to his side.

Later, after Han Ki-seok became a User and stopped contacting me, I was able to do some self-reflection, but, simultaneously, depression settled within me deeply. After recovering to some extent, I thought I should organize my interpersonal connections for my own self-esteem. At first, I swore that Han Ki-seok was trash and blocked his number, though he would have never called me anyway. With vengeance, I had childishly imagined, ‘I’ll succeed and make you regret everything!’

However, none of that put me at peace. As if a knife were cutting into me, it was always on my mind like something I couldn’t let go of. Eventually, I decided to admit to myself that Han Ki-seok was once good to me and he was the person I needed at that time. It was true that I staved off my loneliness with the fulfilling warmth he exuded. I forgave him one-sidedly just to throw away this hurt.

“….That’s what happened.” But, when I tried to speak these words into reality, there were too many emotions that were hard to explain. The story came out as rambling; it was a bit hard to understand.

However, it was hard to stand the annoying looks the servants were adopting. In the end, I asked in an impatient tone, “What’s with those pitying looks?”

Then, Jung Garam replied in an impudent tone, as if he was waiting for a chance to speak, “I was just feeling sorry for the Choi Lee-kyung who believed that the other was a friend even though he was being robbed of a lot of money.”

“It wasn’t that I believed it, it’s just……Haah. It’s fine. Really.”

To be honest, I didn’t think anyone would understand no matter how eloquently I spoke. In particular, these Red Lotus guys, who’ve lost their lives due to Bae Jaemin’s betrayal, probably wouldn’t understand how I don’t hate him or actively search for revenge. In that context, their frustrated faces were understandable.

“You can’t hate him just because he was kind to you just a few times…”

“……”

“Han Ki-seok is simply just a nasty guy. He may have been nice a few times, but his affection was fickle. You shouldn’t have to hesitate to cut him out. I’ve seen a lot of bullies like him.” Following Jung Garam, Kim Olim also made her statements. She shook her head–it seemed as if she was thinking of my feelings.

Unexpectedly, Kim Olim didn’t criticize me and said, “Well, it seems like you don’t really need my advice if you haven’t contacted him yet.”

Then, she reached out and stroked my head–a rare gesture from her. Is this her version of consolation? I couldn’t avoid it, so I stared at her a bit awkwardly……

“……Don’t pretend to be cute. A full grown adult shouldn’t have that expression…it’s too much.” She said, rapidly taking her hand off when our eyes met.

When did I act cute though?? I was bewildered, but I couldn’t even complain because Kim Olim had such a serious expression.

Seo Dawon, who watched over us, smiled and opened his mouth, trying to clean up the situation. “If you’re done eating, shall we go back to what we were discussing yesterday?”

* * *

Afterwards, the table was quickly cleaned, and the traitor’s profiles were placed on top. Among them, there were some faces I knew–a few I saw through the [Vengeful Ghost’s Memories] and a few I saw with Bae Jaemin, and there were some faces I didn’t recognize.

Those who worked in the Red Lotus guild or those the guild members personally knew were marked in red. Most impressively, Koo Kyungman’s profile was greyed out. Was that because he’s already been dealt with? Anyways, I shook my head, trying to shake away the memories of when I last saw him.

Following Koo Kyungman was the person named [Park Hoseok]. When I saw his brutal impression exuded by the photo, I had thought I had seen him somewhere.

It turned out that Park Hoseok was one of the party members accompanying Bae Jaemin at the department store. So I knew that his face was familiar, but… It wasn’t that I knew this face well, but I felt like we’ve talked about Park Hoseok before, somehow.

However, I didn’t have much time to dig into this contradiction. The servants were busily engrossed in plotting out traps to catch the traitors, sharing data and the speculations that they had been investigating…The strange feeling felt insignificant, so I started paying attention to what they were saying without further lingering thoughts.

“In Park Hoseok’s profile, we should pay attention to his career path. After [Red Lotus’s] execution, he moved to [Red Dragon] and is now an

executive of [Ha Hae]. And, strangely enough, the fact that he's the owner of [Gae Bolg] is not publicly well-known information."

TL: Short update while I'm in between classes. I hope you've enjoyed the back-to-back 3 chapters! I'll probably have a more erratic schedule after this (for example, next update will be in 2-3 days) Because I've started a new semester of grad school already and am teaching the introductory class of my department >.< 30 baby undergrads!!

In some ways, this chapter was both relaxing and hard to translate because it was so easy to relate to Lee-kyung. I can't help but feel that ultimately deciding that Ki-seok was "someone who was once good to me" and that "he needed him at the time" before forgiving both himself and the other was an emotionally mature thing to do.

Footnotes

1. PC Rooms are like…computer cafes? They're places that have a lot of computers and you can rent to use one and play games.

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Chapter 118

Chapter 118

Kim Olim, who had just spoken, pointed to a few more recently uploaded pages of data.

Normally popular weapons–especially those of mythical class like [Gae Bolg]–are objects of envy for many Users. Of course, the better the weapon the more people would aim to take it for themselves, but no one would be crazy enough to come for Park Hoseok, who was currently building his career in one of the most popular ranker guilds.

Nevertheless, according to Kim Olim's data, he focused on not exposing his information to the outside world. Also, the amount he spent annually on external security was astronomical. He spent more money on his and his family's security than Bae Jaemin, a semi-celebrity. If that data was accurate, it meant that Park Hoseok was incredibly sensitive to matters of his own safety and had a cautious personality.

"He won't be an easy person to raid and, based on his tendencies, he's sure to run away if he's at the slightest disadvantage."

"Haah. I guess our Hoseok-ie hyung-nim doesn't have the courage befitting his pecs?" [1] Jung Garam, who had been horribly beaten by Park Hoseok, surprisingly didn't flare in temper and calmly lowered his eyes.

Of course he was being sarcastic, but he did not make unreasonable demands like requesting a one-on-one battle. Rather, Jung Garam glanced at me instead and asked, 'What? Are you sick?" and maintained a relaxed and stoic attitude.

“N-No… It’s just…” I was actually going to ask if he were okay, but I ended up shaking my head to cover that up. After all, in my eyes, it was good if Jung Garam stayed calm.

Then, I made eye contact with Seo Dawon for a brief moment; he smiled, as if he knew what I was worried about. I looked at his red eyes, as if possessed, and felt a calm settle in, shoulders relaxing.

After staring at me tiresomely, Seo Dawon soon turned towards Kim Olim and asked her a question, “Is there anyone who Park Hoseok will let his guard down around?”

“His family. He’s especially famous for being a devoted husband.” Kim Olim turned to the back page of Park Hoseok’s profile. Following her gaze, there was a picture of a woman shopping with a child.

Below, there were pictures that looked like it were taken from the woman’s passport and another of her three children. There were several more pictures of Park Hoseok together with his family–impressively enough, they looked like they were taken during some family trip.

Though he normally looked quite grim with that scarred face and large body, in these photos he looked like a mild family man. I could immediately perceive his attachment to his family.

“Though his wife isn’t a User, she’s still living in the hub after marrying Park Hoseok. She lives in a mansion located 10 minutes away and is said to be a Florist.”

“This lady is from a good family?”

“That’s right. It would have normally been hard for Park Hoseok if he hadn’t become a Red Dragon guild executive. In fact, it took quite a long time for him to get permission to marry her because of family line differences.”

While listening to the two’s conversation, I saw in Park Hoseok’s wife’s profile that her father was a three-term law-maker with a big stake in the

political world. Her maternal grandfather was also a member of the National Assembly [2], so it seemed that her family was deeply involved in politics.

"Before becoming a User, Park Hoseok was the head of the security team guarding this family. He was an elite, straight from the special forces in France. There was no particular problems with security, but it was recorded that he was fired after six months for no given reason. Probably, he was caught with the family's little lady. It looks like he became a User after that; he finished User registration two months after he got fired."

At first glance, this was a romantic story. He fell in love while guarding the young lady of a political family and was unable to meet her because of her family's opposition. However, he became a self-made man and eventually succeeded in marrying her…

However, Park Hoseok did not rise the ranks in Red Dragon in a normal way. After all, he didn't stand out during his first 10 months at the Hub.

He even experienced some severe frustration in the middle of that town, selling all of his equipment and checking into the mental hospital for depressive events. He definitely tried to give up on the path of being a User. However, the next year, he joined the large [Red Dragon] guild out of nowhere.

"I think it was probably around then he'd been in contact with Hahae or Koo Kyungman. After Park Hoseok joined the Red Dragon, around 200 million won and 1 billion won were laundered through his account every few months. By 6 months, 30 percent of the Red Dragon Guild funds had been laundered in his name."

And so, supported by Koo Kyungman, he was carried through the guild's leveling system and received their aid. According to the records, Park Hoseok used the guild dungeon about 80 times a month in that year alone. I could not control my surprise reading about this.

If he visited 80 times a month, then that meant he must have gone to the dungeons almost three times a day…… It was almost impossible to do this

because of fatigue and the chance for the person to get killed rises. In short, the Red Dragon invested heavily into Park Hoseok.

“Koo Hui-seo handed these records over to us. Since it’s one of Red Dragon’s internal documents, what’s recorded should be fairly accurate.” Kim Olim continued.

“And, according to our Hui-seo hyung, it’s usually impossible to get treated this well and enjoy a large amount of Koo Kyungman’s trust without something more. These aren’t benefits you can easily garner just because you’ve helped out with some money laundering.”

“Refrain from vulgar language, Jung Garam.”

“Oka~ay.”

Just as Jung Garam said, it was impossible to use the guild dungeon to level up so quickly just for helping with money laundering.

It was certain that Park Hoseok must have signed a private, unrevealed contract with Koo Kyungman, but I couldn’t hazard a guess as to its contents.

Fortunately, though, Seo Dawon spoke up, stopping us from wasting time on speculation, “Kyungman-ie is still alive. Koo Hui-seo asked him.”

I grew pale, remembering the sight of him tied to the bed. Anyways, more importantly, the former guildmaster must have opened up. When I didn’t say anything, Seo Dawon kindly began to explain, “Park Hoseok briefly worked with a small guild before joining the Red Dragon; The guildmaster there and he were high school classmates. Before leaving, that guildmaster recommended him as a bodyguard.”

“…….”

“But, this guildmaster had the same class as Park Hoseok, you know. The same warrior body-build. That guy was killed in an accident while raiding the [Aporea Temple] dungeon with Park Hoseok. The issue is that,

the week before they entered the dungeon, that guildmaster had acquired the [Gae Bolg] and posted its certification on his own online forum. Of course, that's been deleted now."

"No way……"

"Since then, the only information that has ever surfaced about [Gae Bolg] was an article that stated that Koo Kyungman had won the spear in an Auction bid. Therefore, many people still believe that [Gae Bolg]'s owner is Koo Kyungman. Koo Kyungman said himself that he had received the spear as a bribe."

Taking into account Seo Dawon's words, Park Hoseok probably killed his friend in the dungeon, took [Gae Bolg] from him, and handed it over to Koo Kyungman to craft the perfect life as a User.

It wasn't so surprising to hear such atrocities from a man who so cold-bloodedly murdered Jung Garam, nevertheless I couldn't help but feel nauseous when I saw Park Hoseok's happy family photos. Despite the fact that he gained this happiness from betraying his friend, his expression was spotlessly full of affection. It was beyond the limits of my moral comprehension…

"Since that's how he earned it all, Park Hoseok, to this day, did whatever Koo Kyungman ordered. That's why the two grew closer, day by day."

"What kind of things did he do for Koo Kyungman?"

"Probably illegal things. His 'loyal dog' Hoseok took care of the dirty work that was too risky for Koo Kyungman to do himself," Seo Dawon said as he took out something that looked like a small plastic chip and placed it on the table.

Then, Jung Garam grabbed it and connected it to the laptop between us. Seo Dawon had taken out an USB–there was a voice audio file inside. After hitting play, Koo Hui-seo's smooth voice and Koo Kyungman's inarticulate, slurred one flowed out of the speakers.

TL: Classes are mega draining me out >.< Updates will be slow for a bit.

Footnotes

1. is a vulgar way to refer to chest muscles. The nuance is something like….muscle daddy?
2. Think Congress

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Chapter 119

Chapter 119

[Are you in a lot of pain?]

[Gasp… N-no… I-I’m fine…]

[I dropped by since I had something to ask you. Look at this photograph carefully. Apparently, he was in our guild–Park Hoseok, I mean.]

[Ah……]

When Koo Kyungman hesitated to answer, we could hear something that sounded like the dull thud of a blow. Did Koo Hui-seo hit his brother? However, it didn’t sound like ordinary violence. If one listened carefully, you could hear the sound of something being squeezed, like liquid squeezing itself through a too-small pipe–as if something was about to be cut off. This was followed by a long, ominous silence.

After about 10 seconds, there was a scream and an imploring voice, as if someone was seizing.

[I’ll ssppeak! Hyu..ng… Ple–ase…! P-please! Hnngk! Nghh….! I’ll sa–ay everything…! Please! No more….]

It sounded like he was both crying and laughing, but either way he was desperately begging relief for whatever torture he was suffering. Listening to his speech, I had briefly thought Koo Kyungman had perhaps damaged his teeth or was perhaps speaking through a gag, but there was no particular reason to voice that thought.

Afterwards, Koo Hui-seo did not do more to further urge his brother, but Koo Kyungman quickly spoke as if he were on the run.

[Dwuring… Wed Lo'us…]

[During Red Lotus?]

[Yes…]

[You're talking about the annihilation of the Red Lotus guild?]

[Y-yes…]

[Park Hoseok helped you then? The whole execution must have been conducted in such a secretive manner, though.]

[H-hoseokie… Hoseokie was…b-because ub mee… He was able…to marry…]

[Hmmm… By the way, how did you come to be so intimate with this Park Hoseok person?]

[H-he had been…borrowing…money… fwom me….]

[He borrowed money?

[Y-yess…]

[And then?]

[H-he couldn’t repay… Later in–stead… he said there was…some–one else…who cud repay…on his behaf…]

To summarize Koo Kyungman’s stuttered slurs, Park Hoseok had invested a lot of money into buying items and skill books in the hopes of becoming stronger as fast as possible.

However, the only way for Park Hoseok, a man in his late 20s from an ordinary family, to buy the items that caught his eye was through loans. Even though he thought it was a dangerous deal, he was forced to use the private loan service at the Red Dragon guild. To make matters worse, he had to waste time recuperating in a hospital after an accident while recklessly making his way through dungeons. The living expenses incurred during that time also added to his remaining debt.

The [Red Dragon] guild, even before hubs and dungeons, was a loan shark agency run by gangsters, so they had no mercy on those who could not repay their loans.

Eventually, Park Hoseok, who was dragged to the [Red Dragon] guild headquarters on the day of his discharge from the hospital, revealed that his acquaintance was in possession of [Gae Bolg] in a desperate bid to save his own life. Koo Kyungman, who happened to be at the collection site [1] showed interest in this info and offered to clear his debt if Park Hoseok could bring that weapon to him within a week.

[Th-thwee days… he managed to bwing it…]

[He managed to bring it to you in three days?]

[Y-yes…]

[And since then he’s been your man?]

[I t-thought he’d b-be… a u-useful gu–uy so…]

Since then, as Koo Kyungman said, the former guild leader had been literally using Park Hoseok like a dog; Koo Kyungman had been advised by the [Red Dragon] guild’s legal counsel to run all illegal activities through Park Hoseok. In the event of legal issues, Park Hoseok would become the chosen scapegoat that would shoulder all of Koo Kyungman’s blame.

Though Park Hoseok was definitely aware of that fact, he surrendered to the money Koo Kyungman provided. It was under that same context that Park Hoseok was given an exceptional promotion to become a [Red Dragon] guild executive. He buried his head in the sand like an ostrich and was made into a scarecrow–a puppet boss. [2]

[Then, how did Park Hoseok transfer over to HaHae as its deputy guildmaster?]

[…I was suspicious… of B-bae Jaemin…]

[So, you sent him to be a spy?]

[Ye–es… B-but, lately… I… haven’t been able to… con–tact him…]

He said that recently he had doubts about HaHae’s current direction and camouflaged Park Hoseok as a loyal entourage to Bae Jaemin; however, it seemed like the dog wanted to cut off his leash.

Through this conversation, we had not only uncovered Park Hoseok’s ugly past but had also found out that while the amount of revenge targets may be numerous–there were plenty of holes and they were not infallible. It may have seemed like they shared a close relationship as comrades when they gathered together to defeat the Red Lotus, but, in the end, they were

intertwined in their own interests and could not trust each other fully. If we dug into these weaknesses, wouldn't we be able to destroy their bonds with little effort?

While I thought about the possibilities for a while, Seo Dawon pressed the stop button on the audio file. There were about 10 minutes left, but he must have judged that the remaining content was not worth listening to. "Actually, he sent this as a video, but–in my opinion–I thought it was too provocative so I changed it into an audio file."

"Ah…"

"And, after this, hmm…Well, Koo Hui-seo is just 'confirming' the information he received, so there's not much to get out of it."

He meant that it showed something I wouldn't want to see. I nodded my confirmation.

In fact, I had exhausted half my energy today just by listening to this conversation, so I was glad that he stopped at that point. If I continued to listen to Koo Kyungman's clumsy slurs and the resulting torture… I felt sorry just thinking about it.

Regardless of my complicated feelings, Kim Olim turned to me and explained, "So, I learned the address of the villa where Park Hoseok spends every vacation with his family. Next time he goes, we should take care of him there. I think it'd be a good chance to grab [Gae Bolg] as well."

"It just so happens that he's going at the end of this month–just two weeks away." Jung Garam murmured excitedly.

Flustered by the fast pace, I responded, "In two weeks?"

Seo Dawon reassured me with a smile, "The dog who had, as time went by, been searching for the opportunity to escape must be feeling rising hope now that his owner's disappeared. Now is the time Park Hoseok will be the most deluded. We'll have a chance of victory to catch him off guard before he wakes up from his dream."

Hearing that, the worry that things were happening too quickly disappeared. At that time, Park Hoseok, who was usually quite cautious, will be most careless.

Park Hoseok wasn't a fool after all–he must have known that he had no future with Koo Kyungman. Furthermore, he had all that he wanted in the palms of his hands now. Because of Koo Kyungman, he got enough money to marry his long-cherished lover, but, in the end, he probably would have gone to jail or be killed for the sake of burying Koo Kyungman's secrets.

Only then did I realize why Park Hoseok was so obsessed with his own safety: he was wary of Koo Kyungman. Then, at his owner's command, he infiltrated Bae Jaemin's entourage; when he was finally able to breathe, he would finally have the space to plot how to run away and escape Koo Kyungman's eyes. "Is that why he was trying to cut off contact and organize his affairs when he infiltrated HaHae?"

"That's right. Since he was free from being a laundering machine, he would've wanted a fresh start."

"But, couldn't Bae Jaemin already know of Park Hoseok's identity and position? Or maybe Park Hoseok told Bae Jaemin…"

"Park Hoseok isn't a fool. If one reveals themself and asks for protection, then all that will happen is that the name of the owner on the collar changes. It's far from the genuine freedom he desires."

"Ahhh…"

"In addition, if Park Hoseok hadn't revealed his identity as a spy, then Bae Jaemin would have discovered that fact later. But, seeing how he has maintained his position in HaHae thus far, I think it's possible that Bae Jaemin doesn't know the truth." Seo Dawon explained that a deputy guildmaster would exercise full authority during the guildmaster's absence. If Bae Jaemin knew Park Hoseok was a spy for the [Red Dragon] guild, then he would never have been given that seat.

Of course, since there were often several deputy guildmasters, a guildmaster’s absence does not freely allow them to wield full power immediately. That still wasn’t a position to leave to a suspected spy.

TL: Heyo~ Thanks for being patient. Today will be a bit of a mass upload day (not for this novel though, I’ll be uploading a long chapter for another game-like novel I tl). This is what I do when students don’t come to office hours T_T

Whenever I forget about what happened to Koo Kyungman, I’m rudely reminded of his fate.

Footnotes

1. headquarters for…forcing people to repay their loans. As used by gangs and sketchy loan sites.
2. a proverb meaning to hide one’s eyes to believe in the deceit.

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Chapter 120

Chapter 120

‘But, if Park Hoseok is on vacation… Wouldn’t his family be there as well?’

After hearing the explanation, I could believe that trying to get rid of him during the upcoming vacation wasn’t such a wild plan.

Especially since it felt like Park Hoseok and Bae Jaemin’s relationship was not as intimate as I had thought. Whether we capture Park Hoseok–kidnap or kill him–I believed that Bae Jaemin wouldn’t be concerned with the spear wielder’s safety if the information that he’s the Red Dragon’s spy was leaked. The pandemonium would draw Bae Jaemin’s focus right away, so there was less to worry about in the aftermath.

However, the fact that his young daughters and his wife would spend their vacation with Park Hoseok snagged at my heart. Though Park Hoseok may be the most useless trash, a despicably unique existence in this world, I wasn’t sure I could follow the plan if his family were harmed in this operation. It felt uncomfortable–as if a hand was grabbing at the back of my head.

‘Beggars can’t be choosers, but…’ [1]

I know I’m not in a position to be choosy against a Ranker whose [Gae Bolg] incapacitated Jung Garam. Though the younger boy avoided its attack a few times, I wouldn’t be able to hold out for 10 seconds against that spear if I were to enter Park Hoseok’s field of view.

In fact, the best method may be to take his family hostage and not even give him the chance to swing [Gae Bolg].

If I dithered because I had no desire to hurt a woman or her children, I had no idea whether or not my contracted servants would tolerate such weakness. Well, if I were to refuse, maybe the servants will take me out of the plan to kidnap Park Hoseok's family…

'…But I can't keep maintaining this ambiguous distance with them.'

Walking that fine line, neither here nor there, was sure to cause our relationship to become more crooked. Since we're in the same boat, I had to give my all for their revenge.

The servants signed a contract with me and treated me nominally as their master, but I wasn't in full control of them. Of course, there was a large issue in the power gap that led me to be unable to deal with them, but also the fact that I don't directly share their resentful feelings also played a part in this distance. This distance between us certainly wouldn't help in the future.

'Still, Kim Olim…would probably think similarly…?'

I briefly glanced at Kim Olim, the Paladin who stood with her arms folded in front of her like a rigid stone statue. However, after recalling her memory playback, I wasn't sure if ethics would mean anything to her anymore. Furthermore, Kim Olim also tended to follow Seo Dawon's instructions.

However, unexpectedly, Jung Garam had pointed out my concerns first. "We need to put his family to sleep or send them far away and then catch Park Hoseok when he's alone."

"We can cast a simple sleeping spell or place manipulation rituals over the mansion. For up to 8 hours."

"Sleep medication or burning drowsy grass isn't a bad idea either."

Seeing Seo Dawon and Kim Olim agree with Jung Garam's opinion, I was relieved. Others may find it funny that I'm relieved by this, but…only then was I able to take a deep breath and continue listening to their plans.

"There's more people guarding the villa than I thought. However, the villa itself is located in the forest–the family enjoys the quiet–so the area is isolated."

"The guard shifts are on the longer side as well. That'll lower the difficulty."

Since I lacked professional knowledge, I calmly busied myself with embracing all that they said.

Later, though I had no idea how they retrieved such data, they spread a wide map of Park Hoseok's villa on the table. Jung Garam took into account the gathered photos, videos, and explanations of the villa, and crafted a sophisticated 3D model map.

* * *

After running a few simulations on the model, time flew by and it was already evening. Because of the tension generated by the planning, I had lost my appetite and cleaned up the table. Still, while I picked at my food, Seo Dawon and Kim Olim disappeared from the living room. Perhaps they were dealing with another matter.

Flick–!

At that moment, Jung Garam, the only one left sitting in front of me watching me eat my food, suddenly flicked his finger; I gave him a puzzled look. Suddenly, my ears felt muffled. It felt like some foreign substance was irritating them–as if I were wearing noise-canceling headphones.

Jung Garam looked at me, "I blocked the sound for a bit."

“What?”

“I want to say something. For your ears only.”

I was a bit flustered; I didn’t know that Jung Garam, who wasn’t even a Mage, would have access to this skill. Either way, it seemed that he had something important to say. So, I took the initiative to ask, “What is it?”

“This time, summon me instead of Dawon-ie hyung.”

“……What?”

“You can call me out as if I’m alive for 30 minutes, right?”

He requested the use of the skill that allowed a vengeful ghost to manifest and use a simulacra of the strength and skills he had when he was still alive. Since I usually used Seo Dawon, I had no ready answer for Jung Garam’s pesters.

“S-Seo Dawon…”

“Choi Lee-kyung… You saw how Park Hoseok killed me.”

“…….”

“I’ll kill Park Hoseok with my own hands. I use that vaunted [Gae Bolg] the same way and spear his stomach.” His face looked like a proper young master. But, unlike his playful attitude, bloodthirst poured from his eyes.

Jung Garam tilted his head and whispered, devilishly, “Until when will you live as Dawon-hyung’s marionette? What this operation needs most is time, anyway. You know, since you heard the explanation with us. This time, I can neutralize him faster than Dawon-ie hyung.”

“……” Of course, I couldn’t answer right away.

Jung Garam, staring at my passivity, swept through his hair with his hands, frustrated. He shouted, “Why do you only use your personal skills

with Dawon-hyung's permission? You can't believe in your own judgment?"

"That's…Compared to Seo Dawon, I'm…"

"Because you know nothing and your level is low? I'm telling you I'm the right choice this time, though? Even Olim-noona can't keep up with me in close-quarters combat. Dawon-hyung is normally good at everything, but, in this case, he can't match Park Hoseok once his position is exposed."

"……"

"Further, I've already experienced [Gae Bolg]'s irregular attack patterns. So, between the three of us, I'm the one that can deal with it the fastest."

I still gave him a perplexed expression; Jung Garam should know what I meant. Even if he were to explain everything here now…if Seo Dawon refused, that was it. I had no ability to stand up to the Mage; More than that, Seo Dawon was…

"Am I wrong?" Jung Garam said.

"It's not that you're wrong…"

"Then, you should tell Dawon-hyung that you're planning to summon me first during this operation."

"Rather than me telling Seo Dawon that…"

"Hyung thinks that I'll lose my rationality. That's why he won't allow it."

"……"

"He just wants to avoid small mistakes or any unforeseen situations. He thinks that if he's the one summoned, chances of failure will be reduced."

"……"

“It’s because of his perfectionist tendencies. He’s always been like that, but it’s gotten worse after the resurrection. It’s like he doesn’t trust his teammates anymore.”

“That’s…”

“You feel it too, right? Whatever it may be, Dawon-hyung never lets you know in advance.”

Just as Jung Garam said, Seo Dawon was the type to finalize all the plans within his own head. I’ve felt that a few times before. That’s why I had no choice but to sit back and watch him anxiously.

That was exactly Jung Garam’s point. I was surprised to learn that Jung Garam was left out of Seo Dawon’s plans, and I was even more alarmed to learn that the young Assassin noticed my unhappiness at Seo Dawon’s tendencies.

“That’s true, but… Because of that… Because that’s Seo Dawon’s personality, do you think he’ll listen to me?” Eventually, I could not deny Jung Garam’s words and resignedly answered his points.

Jung Garam’s expression became immediately bright as soon as I responded. He whispered, as if he were teasing me, “Isn’t this a chance to experiment?”

“What?”

“Whether or not Dawon-hyung will listen to you.”

“Of course he wouldn’t listen to me.”

“Do you really think that?”

“……”

At Jung Garam’s urging, I felt a bizarre impulse. Of course when I considered Seo Dawon’s behavior until now, he was the type to do as he pleased with a brazen look upon his face…There was little chance he’d

accept my suggestions…But, at the same time, I thought, ‘It wouldn’t hurt to give it a try?’

I shook my head in denial, as if I were trying to wake myself from useless thoughts. Jung Garam–perhaps he knew the culprit behind my current hesitation–continued to firmly insist, “It’s better to use me this time. Dawon-hyung is just afraid I’ll mess everything up by rushing at Park Hoseok like an idiot.”

“I…..I mean, I’m not trying to underestimate you… I’m…”

“Choi Lee-kyung. Look at me. Do you really think that the moment I see Park Hoseok, I’ll see red and chase after him? Do you really think that I’m going to lose my mind and ruin whatever plan we have?”

That question forced me to raise my head and look carefully at Jung Garam. When our eyes met, I had no choice but to give him all the answers he wanted, “No…”

“In short, this operation is just about luring Park Hoseok to some secluded location where we can force some information out of him before killing him, right?”

“Mhm…”

“So, deliver my thoughts to Seo Dawon-hyung as a ‘proposal.’ I’m not asking you to win over or smother Dawon-hyung.”

And, before I could do anything more, Seo Dawon and Kim Olim entered the dining room. Jung Garam looked away, as if we never had this conversation, and the two that entered appeared to not have heard mine and Jung Garam’s talk.

TL: Update late at night~ I keep getting messages from kofi about some monthly subscription thing, and I honestly can't imagine why someone would do that over patreon? But I'm also clueless about things like this.

Also Garam-ie wants to take this operation in his own hands! It's interesting to see him point out some of Seo Dawon's big flaws (and Lee-kyung's) at the same time. As much as I adore the mage, I share a lot of the people's frustrations around him.

Footnotes

1. The literal translation is "I'm not in the position to be picky about cold rice or hot rice" aka beggars can't be choosers :D

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Chapter 121

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I looked nervously at Seo Dawon, side-eyeing Jung Garam simultaneously. Do I… have to bring up what we talked about now? I felt pressured.

However, while I was hesitating, Kim Olim took the initiative to speak first, “Necromancer.”

“…Oh, uhuh?”

“I just discussed the details of your training with Seo Dawon.”

“Training?”

“That’s right. We’ve plotted training that will, for the next two weeks, work to maximize your survivability. After hearing from Seo Dawon all that had happened before, I couldn’t help but laugh. You’re so lucky we met now; otherwise, we’d have met in the underworld.” Kim Olim spoke as if she were looking at an annoying piece of luggage. I almost grew angry at the sight of her expression. But, looking back at previous events, I really had been quite lucky; I closed my mouth. I was truly the weakest on this team. If I were to die, the whole plan falls apart; I was the fatal vulnerability…

However, Kim Olim’s intense criticism was not directed at me but, surprisingly, Seo Dawon. “Seo Dawon planned things so poorly. I can’t believe he thought a combat suit was enough to drag you around… Koo

Hui-seo, too. I heard you were left alone in a room with the insidious chimera. If I were there, I would have never tolerated that."

"I've never left Lee-kyung-ie completely vulnerable. [1] I've placed the most powerful protective magic I know on him–spells like [Counter Attack]."

"Even if you place a thousand protective magic spells, there will always be gaps. Also, Seo Dawon, you have no knowledge of useful protective equipment or magic that would be useful to those of Choi Lee-kyung's level. Expensive doesn't unilaterally mean 'good'."

"Really? I thought I did my best, but…" In addition, Seo Dawon meekly accepted Kim Olim's criticisms. Just what on earth did they talk about for Seo Dawon to fold and retreat a few steps? Of course, I had never thought that my life wasn't in danger, but I had also never suffered a life-changing injury. So, Kim Olim's unexpected criticisms even made me feel a bit dazed.

In the past, I once crossed the street without much thought. My friend, who was waiting for me on the opposite side, said that I barely avoided a car crash. I remembered how he made a fuss–was I truly in so much danger? I was embarrassed then, and the feeling overlapped now.

"But… Is Koo Hui-seo really that dangerous? And I've never been seriously hurt or anything…" As if I were on auto-pilot, I tried to tell Kim Olim that I was alright. Even as I said it, I felt like I was making a mis-step; sure enough, Kim Olim turned to look at me with a frown and a crumpled brow, confirming my suspicions. Seo Dawon also had a dissatisfied expression.

Kim Olim snapped at me immediately, "Koo Hui-seo is a blood-cursed chimera. Don't tell me, you didn't even know this? Those are some of the worst things in history. He's someone who's been revived from a state that a top-level witch–his mother–had placed him in after offering up his humanity. Come to think of it, I've always wanted to ask: Why the hell are you still allowing Koo Hui-seo to flirt with you?"

“What do you mean, ‘offering his humanity’?” This was the first time I’ve heard anything about that. However, everyone twisted their mouths, as if they already knew about this matter.

Frustrated, Kim Olim was the only one to explain, “Can’t you tell from just looking at him? You must have heard about Koo Hui-seo’s past. It’s not like Koo Hui-seo’s mother left her son unattended. When you entered the room, wasn’t he fused with something like a tree?”

“…H-he was.”

“Who would turn someone into a chimera just to lock them up. If all four limbs were manacled, he wouldn’t be able to move.”

Now that I think about it, it would even have been enough to just leave him in restraints.

And I was shocked by my own admission. Actually, why did I accept Koo Hui-seo’s condition without any further questions? And Koo Kyungman after that… Had I just been too traumatized to think deeply lately?

Barreling through my inner consternations, Kim Olim continued without any hesitations, “No matter how you see it, I can only consider him in that state as simply an ingredient for some black magic that was ‘stuffed in storage’. Even after resurrection, how could you call that a human? That’s a monster or a cursed object–not a human being.”

“I-I see…”

“I’m telling you to not let monsters close just because they can talk.”

“I mean, b-but… I just thought… I thought he would be all better after the curse was lifted.”

“What’s so normal about forcing his brother to have ‘his child’? You show kindness and sympathy to such strange things.”

“Koo Hui-seo even broke his dear mother’s neck–consumed and cleared it away.” After Kim Olim’s sarcastic remarks, Seo Dawon quietly added his own two cents. I had forgotten about Chairwoman Shin, but I felt faint recalling her end. A corner of my heart felt sad at Koo Hui-seo’s admission that he felt happiness from his mother’s late acknowledgment. Then, not even a day later after that vulnerable confession, Koo Hui-seo turned unexpectedly on his mother…

I stroked the back of my neck which was slowly beginning to feel cold. I stuttered, embarrassed for some reason, “It’s not that I’m not wary of Koo Hui-seo… He acts like someone with a few screws missing after all…”

“……”

“…….”

“It’s just…none of that meant that I thought he was normal! I just……I just thought Koo Hui-seo liked me..just a bit? Actually, more than like…a crush? I didn’t think he was going to hurt me…” I thought I had always kept a good distance between Koo Hui-seo and me. Since we had a contract, I didn’t believe he’d make a mess or act untowardly for no reason… Above all, Koo Hui-seo always acted like a dog wagging his tail whenever he saw me.

Aside from his usual bizarre behavior–his constant texting–his sycophantic tendencies had made me loosen my wariness. To be honest, if I were to hit him, I think he’d calmly let me pound away…

However, Seo Dawon seemed to have already guessed my wishy-washy heart; he pointed out the areas that I may be mistaken, “That’s right. Koo Hui-seo likes you. Usually, you want to obtain the hearts of those you like, right? But Koo Hui-seo is different–one-sided affection is enough for him.”

“Huh?”

“What I’m saying is this: he likes you, and he won’t consider how his actions born of that love could possibly hurt you.”

"……"

"If we're taking it to the extreme, he may kidnap you, lock you in his room, and consider that his version of a proposal. He'll probably think the same for anything worse."

"……"

"Since that kind of person is always buzzing around in your presence, I wanted to clear him away when the time is right…but the cursed blood that runs through his veins is quite tricky to deal with. How annoying. Mm… well, anyhow, we all hoped you'd be a bit more careful."

Seo Dawon had downcast eyes when he muttered, 'annoying.' Judging from that expression, I could tell that he must have thought about killing Koo Hui-seo many times. The bloodthirst he could not hide prickled at my arms.

"Ah, I understand…" I answered with a quick head shake.

However, Kim Olim, who seemed to have relaxed her crumpled forehead throughout this conversation, suddenly said something strange, "Yes, Necromancer. Get your head on straight. And, honestly, it's not your life that Koo Hui-seo's after: it's your sympathy and compassion… I want you to be wary of that."

"W-what are you talking about, all of a sudden!"

"You know that Jung Garam had already designated Koo Hui-seo's messages as spam, right? He's sent a good amount of unpleasant photos… He's most definitely a pervert."

"What?" I looked towards Jung Garam, surprised.

Jung Garam shrugged when our eyes met, "It's probably possible to press him for criminal charges."

Wait, what on earth did he send? I grabbed my cell phone to check, but Jung Garam cut in, "I've already wiped it clean." In other words, he's

claiming that he sacrificed himself for my mental health.

“W-what did he send?”

“It was a specific body part…Do I really need to say what it was? Give a description? I didn’t want you to see so I purposefully erased it.”

“Really? He sent something like that…?”

Is he crazy?

Imagining something bizarre and unpleasant, I quickly let go of the cell phone. I remembered how Seo Dawon said that Koo Hui-seo wouldn’t care whether or not I returned his feelings. No…even if that was the case, how could someone send a photo like that…?

TL: Olim laying down the law and scolding Seo Dawon, lmao.

Also, I 100% believe that Koo Hui-seo would be the type to send unsolicited nudes, smh.

Footnotes

1. = naked body. It literally means “bare self”.

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Chapter 122

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Frowning in displeasure, Seo Dawon approached me and suddenly held out his hand.

“Why?” I asked.

“Give me your hand for a minute. I want to add something while I’ve thought of it.” Seo Dawon snatched my hand as soon as I stretched it towards him and opened his mouth.

Strangely, though, I couldn’t hear what he was saying. “What are you doing?”

“Mm, just…I added another protective magic.” With that said, Seo Dawon minutely changed the shape his of mouth again. I felt a bit weird–it felt like there was a glass wall between us–but I did as he asked and simply watched the other.

[One skill link has been added from Servant ‘Seo Dawon.’ A total of 14 types of protection skills are currently applied–all of which are Grade S or higher first-degree protection skills. If you’d like to terminate these skills, please enter your password.]

[Click here to see the list of the applied skill links]

[Description of the added skill link: ‘Prickle Prickle’]

[The description of the added skill link has been written by Servant ‘Seo Dawon’.]

When I waited silently, I saw a completely unfamiliar system message appear in front of me. Just… What on earth was a skill link? 14 additionally applied protection skills? S-grade?? And what’s with ‘prickle prickle’ anyway… What did all of this even mean?

“W-wait a minute…what’s a skill link?”

“Simply put, it’s like storing the skills I can use temporarily in your body. It functions similarly, in a way, to [Memo Rize]?”

[Memo Rize] was such a famous skill that even I knew of it–at least to some extent. [Memo Rize] was one of the most essential skills that a Mage must master; roughly described, the skill allowed one to ‘store’’ a few usable skills before battle.

For example, when using the skill [Fire Ball], a Mage that had mastered the [Memo Rize] skill could activate the spell by flinging his hand or simply shouting, “Fire!” Of course, my simple explanation did not account for the extent by which the skill’s efficiency would vary by the elaborate range of activation, and Users would find it hard to utilize the skill–more so than they originally thought. So, they would often search for know-how from rankers on community boards or pay separate charges to take classes on the uses of [Memo Rize].

“Then….. Will I be able to use your skills?”

“Mm, no. To be exact, the skills I have saved will activate under specific situations. For example, if you incur more than a certain number of injuries, [Recover] is supposed to trigger immediately.”

Which meant that whenever I was in danger or am injured, Seo Dawon’s skills may be activated…

Disconcerted, I asked, “Then, since when have you placed these on me?”

“From the first day. While you were sleeping… Of course, I didn’t do anything strange; I was just merely worried about you, because you were so weak.”

“…What?” If he did that back then, the reasons for his behavior now were clear as well. I mean, no wonder he’d been trying to share a room with me since the very first day he arrived at my home… Was all that effort just to trick me and to sneakily apply skills onto me?

No matter how much he claimed it was all for my benefit, I couldn’t stand feeling like I’d been fooled. Suddenly, all my attention snapped to the system message that still hung in front of me.

[Press ‘here’ to see the list of applied skill links.]

I glanced at Seo Dawon and pressed the bolded ‘here’ in the system message. The list of protective magic that Seo Dawon had applied on me without explaining beforehand popped up.

[‘Counter Attack’ – Trigger: When encountering a magical attack with 4 magic circles’ worth of power (or the equivalent physical strike), counter 150% of the damage to the opponent and allow Choi Lee-kyung to escape to some random coordinates within 10 km. The designated target of the skill is ‘Choi Lee-kyung.’ However, the skill will not activate if ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ avoids the attack.]

[‘Recover’ – Immediately triggered when the designated target, ‘Choi Lee-kyung,’ is injured past a certain threshold. The conditions for activating ‘Recover’ take precedence over the conditions to invoke all other protective magic (leeway of 3 seconds range for error).

Trigger conditions are as follows: Excessive bleeding–losing more than 25% total blood. Unable to move or hide due to broken bones and ruptured muscles. Loss of 50% of vision due to damage to the eyeballs. Loss of consciousness…]

['Defense against Convulsions/Insanity' – When Choi Lee-kyung's mental state is attacked due to exposure to psychological attacks or curses–resulting in hallucinations, visual or auditory–this skill protects Choi Lee-kyung's consciousness. This skill is triggered by all evil-attribute attacks, 3-circle or less power.]

As Seo Dawon said, the skills applied to me were there to protect and for no other reason. The skills below ran along the same lines, such as [Cure Rise]: used to cure effects like poison.

The latest added skill, [Tingling], was a kind of self-defense skill: it delivered a slight electrical shock to those who initiate unwanted, unpleasant physical touches. However, the more I investigated, the more I wondered why he hid the fact that he applied these protective magics on me.

"Well, I appreciate what you've done for me," I started.

"Yeah."

"Why did you keep it a secret from me? It would have been nice for me to know I have this…"

"Since they're single-use, I thought it would be for the best if you weren't conscious of them." Seo Dawon added, "If you know the trigger conditions, you may trust those specifications and act recklessly."

It was as if he were lecturing a child that ignorantly messed with a fire extinguisher, wondering what it was. Now I understood why Jung Garam was frustrated and insisted on being a key player. If Seo Dawon showed the same attitude to Jung Garam as he did to me, then the younger must have

felt like he was talking to a brick wall. The more I thought about it, the more it felt ridiculous. Am I supposed to just trust him and dive in naked?

“Do I look like a child who can’t tell the difference between left and right? More and more, you continue to treat me like a fool…”

“It’s not about not trusting you. I just want you to know that your life shouldn’t be gambled.”

“…….”

“You understand why we’re doing this, right?” Despite knowing my frustrations, Seo Dawon’s tone was off-puttingly aloof. Even though he was ignoring my concerns, he was acting as if it was all for my own benefit… Even my father didn’t act like that.

Eventually, anger filling my every cell from the toes to the top of my head, I snapped at Seo Dawon, “Then, why don’t you just lock me up somewhere and put me on a leash whenever you need to drag me around!?”

“……”

“Wouldn’t you find that more comfortable?!”

However, as soon as I uttered those words, I was surprised by the gleam in Seo Dawon’s eyes. It was only a brief moment, the cold sneer that momentarily clouded his face seemed to say, ‘Do you really think I haven’t thought about doing just that?’

Soon, though, Seo Dawon erased his expression and calmly began to soothe me. “I didn’t mean to treat you like a fool. I just wasn’t confident in my ability to explain things, one by one, and help you to understand. No wonder you find it unpleasant… I understand.”

“……”

“However, Lee-kyung-ah. In the future, there will still be things I must do on my own without being able to explain things to you. Because I don’t know what situations we may find ourselves in–we may not even be

prepared.” With that said, Seo Dawon held my hand and put more force into his grip. Then, seeing how I stood at a loss, he released a small sigh. “But, I’ll strive to tell you what I’m going to do before doing it in the future.”

“……”

“So, don’t taunt me to lock you up… Don’t think like that. Don’t misunderstand me.”

Perhaps he noticed my shock at the dark gleam in his eyes earlier.

After speaking, Seo Dawon gently let go of my hand. I felt that he had metaphorically retreated a step, but I didn’t appreciate it one bit. Right now, he said he would let me know his plans in advance, but it was simply a one-sided notice and not a promise to treat me as an equal.

Rather, my head hurt at the implication that I should be satisfied with him telling me things in advance. Eventually, I asked the question I had been wanting to say from long ago but couldn’t form the words, “Are you looking after my body for the sake of your revenge, or… are you truly worried about my safety?”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Update~ I’ll also have an update tomorrow (Thanks for the Kofi Miya!) I’m just slower nowadays bc of class, so bonus chaps are a bit hard >.<

Lee-kyung finally blew up! It was a matter of time! (And this won’t be the last of their fights, but fights are needed to get water under the bridge!)

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Chapter 123

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Of course, even as I said all that, I didn’t feel refreshed. I had already known that their revenge was irreplaceably important.

So, in actuality, this was such a silly question. For my sake, they could simply pay me lip service, but in the end those were only symbolic bows. Was there really anything other than the fulfillment of their revenge that could truly heal their scars?

That’s why that question wasn’t what I truly wanted to ask. What I really wanted to know was whether or not their favors, obsessions, and little pranks were all calculated. By my own admission, I had an easy-to-read personality; these days I had a growing suspicion that they were simply adjusting the rhythm of their life to placate me or were manipulating my feelings to make me more comfortable to handle.

Of course, I felt that I couldn’t ask them these questions, but… If they had treated me with a stiff distance, I may have been more comfortable. If all they sought was revenge, did they really need to get along with me?

I wasn’t asking for them to lock me away, as I had mentioned before. If they had dealt with me in coldly–a pure business relationship–then maybe I would not have uselessly raised my hopes. Without such presumptuous expectations from the beginning, there would be no need for sorrow or disappointment.

However, Seo Dawon, still facing me, said nothing; his slightly open mouth opened wider before immediately clapping shut–silent.

He looked as if he had a lot to say but would rather not talk because the words may come out too emotional. I was a bit flustered: it was the first time I saw Seo Dawon look as if he was suppressing his anger and frustration. I had thought he'd be cool-headed or say something smug to soothe me.

"Of course I'm worried about you." Seo Dawon replied, a minute later, in a low voice.

But, his response was laden with sarcasm, as if he heard something so absurd and was sick and tired of it. That nuance was so blatant that I angrily shouted, "Well then, why don't you explain anything to me every time? I….!"

"If you knew," Seo Dawon cut me off, "What would change for the better? Why do you insist on knowing everything even if you won't understand it…!"

His question was sharper and more aggressive than I had thought. I was dumbfounded and could only stare vacantly at him.

However, Seo Dawon did not stop there. He approached me with a fierce expression and roughly grabbed my shoulder. "Why is this contract so unstable? Of course that's because the gap between you and I is too large– did you forget that? In the first place, this contract started with you begging and my allowances."

"T-that's true, but…" Flustered by the pressure on my shoulders, I tried to shake him off, but Seo Dawon didn't back down. It was as if he had been expecting this situation.

Seo Dawon came closer to me, who was trying to escape, and whispered. Of course, only the volume of his voice decreased; I could still definitely feel the anger laden in his words, "So now, you're doubting us? You think we can turn around and hurt you at any moment? Don't you know how ridiculous of a misunderstanding that is?"

"…What?"

“How ‘great’ are you that we must plot to kill you? Just with a flick of my little finger like this…”

“Hnnrk…”

“It would be simple.”

Of course, he didn’t actually strangle me even though he said he could do it simply. However, as he stared down at my shrinking self, he muttered, “I’m going crazy…”

Seo Dawon threatened me, but when I was frightened, he was ironically angry. A bit red, like a cardinal–did he not realize what kind of expressions he was making right now?

“Choi Lee-kyung. Are you that scared of me?”

“J-just now you seemed as if you would hit me…”

“What the hell must I do to make you trust me?”

“……”

“I tried, in my own ways,” he added.

Of course, I had never felt that effort, so I just continued locking eyes with the Mage.

Seo Dawon opened his mouth with an angry expression, “Whenever I said anything, you would become jumpy and be hurt, so I changed my speech patterns.”

“……Huh?”

“What can I do when you open your eyes so wide and act as if you have no idea?” Seo Dawon asked, “So, this has nothing at all to do with my attitude, right?” Although he phrased it like a question, I couldn’t answer. His tone made me feel like he was talking to himself, and I kept my mouth shut.

“Haah….” Seo Dawon glanced me up and down before releasing a deep sigh. “You don’t see us as human beings,” he muttered in a tired tone, saying something so inconceivable.

“……What do you mean?”

“Why else do you think we’ll kill you, hurt you, or betray you? Do you view me as a demon–so afraid of us even as we’re enjoying our time together?”

“What are you saying!” That was the most absurd thing I’d ever heard. However Kim Olim and Jung Garam, who were also listening to our conversation, also looked the other way and did not refute the Mage’s words. They seemed to implicitly agree.

Feeling falsely accused, I hurried to deny the other’s words, “I’ve never once thought that before…”

“Really? Then why do you continue to be afraid of me despite how nice I’ve been to you?”

“No… It’s because it feels like you guys are always hiding things from me!”

“I guess you hold no secrets between friends then, huh? You leave everything open and leave nothing.” [1]

Of course, there was nothing I could say in response. Of course I didn’t know every detail about my friends’ personal histories. That wasn’t what I meant…

However, weren’t matters between common friends incomparable to that of the servants’ ambiguous attitudes? Frustratingly, though, my mind felt disorganized and I couldn’t formulate my arguments.

Meanwhile, Seo Dawon continued, “It’s my first time signing with a Necromancer, so I decided I shouldn’t tell you everything before I know

anything for sure. For example, why do we need your blood to sign a contract? Things like that…”

“…..”

“Furthermore, when I see you sometimes, I feel strangely hungry. That doesn’t mean you’re appetizing to me, but, if you knew I felt this urge–these impulses–you’d be wary of me.”

“What……? What’s that?”

“I also have no idea. But, it’s been a while since I’ve felt this urge. The higher you levelled, the worse it became.”

I was flustered by the new information and looked at Seo Dawon and the other servants alternatingly. What do you mean impulses of ‘hunger?’ So then, were those impulses the culprits behind those occasional strange behaviors? For example, their desire to sleep with me…

Then, I suddenly thought of Lackey, my first servant. Lackey always wished to be around me, and it was a rather jealous being.

However, I had never thought that such an attachment was strange because it resembled my previous pet, one that I had raised for quite some while. It was my first summon after becoming a User, so I had continued with a light heart. Lackey was ‘definitely’ like a small dog…

Don’t tell me, will all the servants I sign eventually become obsessed with me like Lackey?

I was devastated after my mind dredged up that idea–enough that I looked at Seo Dawon reflexively. He seemed to have noticed the moment I realized this possibility. He nodded, without smiling.

For them to follow Lackey’s example… For Seo Dawon to blindly love me, for Jung Garam to loyally follow my orders without questioning me, For Kim Olim to not refer to me bluntly as ‘Necromancer’ and instead openly praise me…

That would be such a bizarre sight. I didn't want that. Sorrow at not knowing their inner feelings or hurt at feeling ostracized were emotions born of my affections for the servants.

Of course, Lackey was my precious and lovely Servant, but it would be terrible that all those that could possibly be called my 'friend' were turning into something like Lackey.

Seo Dawon, with a somewhat relaxed face, saw my crumpled expression and said, "My ultimate goal is not revenge. After revenge, I want to return to my previous, intact self."

"……"

"So, I'm collecting resurrection methods. Not only for me, but for all my friends who died at the Tower of Command."

"Well, uh, how should we do that…"

"First of all, we'll have to achieve our revenge. And we'll need to find a way to protect our increasingly fragile selves."

"……"

"I'm glad. You have an appalled look on your face." Seo Dawon smiled.

That smile was different from all others he'd made before. Was that why Seo Dawon, perceiving my thoughts, kept his distance?

Suddenly, I was conscious of a question bubbling from deep within the depths of my heart, 'Then, after Seo Dawon returns to life, what…will happen to me?'

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Words have been said, feelings have been hurt. I know that we've been mostly following from Lee-kyung's perspective, but Lee-kyung's inherent reluctance to become intimate with others (and his justifiable fear of the servants) have been hurting Dawon, Garam, and Olim as well. Both groups are misunderstanding each other's intentions.

But we also have Seo Dawon's goal of coming back to life 😀

Next time– less stressful things. maybe.

Footnotes

1. This was said sarcastically, I hope it does come off that way.

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Chapter 124

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However, it was not the time to be caught up with such ideas. Kim Olim, who sensed that the atmosphere had gentled, broke into our conversation with a short sigh, “So, without having to level up, I’ve been thinking about self defense methods where you can protect yourself or create exploitable gaps. They left the training program–and the role of coach–to me.”

“Training?”

“That’s right. No matter how clumsy you may be, I can at least teach you the correct way to fall in two weeks.”

“…Why are you already expecting me to be clumsy though?”

However, Kim Olim did not pay much attention to my grumbled complaints and instead immediately brought forth a system message before my eyes.

[A description of ‘Training Program 1’ has arrived from Servant ‘Kim Olim.’ Do you confirm, thus moving onto the message contents?]

Left without a choice, I accepted the incoming message and checked Kim Olim’s program. The content was similar to a Powerpoint, filled with

pictures and illustrations; it took quite a long while to scroll down to the bottom because of the overall length.

Terrified by the amount, I stuttered, "……We're doing this in just two weeks?"

"What are you saying? I've enclosed a total of 10 training modules. This means that it'll take two weeks to learn all 10."

"W-What!"

"For your information, training starts today. Since breakfast should be digested by now, we should start moving." With that said, Kim Olim smiled somewhat ominously. "I look forward to your cooperation. It'll be good for you to learn while I can still be strict with you."

"Mmm… Can I watch, noona?"

"Actually, I was going to ask something of you first. There's no one else who can help spar without harming Choi Lee-kyung."

"Oooh… Well, I guess it's safest if I do it."

"W-Wait a minute…What do you mean 'spar'! There's no way I could beat Jung Garam!" I cried.

"Do you think anyone here is expecting you to win against Jung Garam?"

However, my cries of protest were cut short.

In the end, I was thoroughly trained by both Kim Olim and Jung Garam, slammed into an exercise mat–when was this even ordered?–in the living room of this fancy house.

"Choi Lee-kyung, how many times have I told you? I've said that there's a preferred direction for joints to bend?" Kim Olim shouted.

“Argh! It hurts! Hurts!!”

The training was…much more degrading than I expected.

“So, I’ve said you need to use more strength in the opposing direction in order to release the force you’ve been storing.”

“Ah! I said it hurts!”

Damn it…

Again and again I screamed my surrender because of the pain that arose from my bent wrists, but Jung Garam didn’t stop. He released his arm that bent my own behind my back, used a new arm to strangle my neck. Bound by both arms, I experienced a new pain when he squeezed.

“This technique is called ‘chicken wings'” Jung Garam said.

“Nnnghh!”

“It hurts, doesn’t it? Try to escape in 3 seconds.”

Kim Olim, who should be stopping this situation, was simply typing notes on my conditions and was not imposing any restrictions upon Jung Garam’s sadistic pedagogy.

Jung Garam was even more excited as he overpowered me through my screams and tears. Even now I dealt with the pain of being squeezed everywhere as the sadistic teacher wrapped his legs around my waist and dragged me backwards into a submission hold.

Bastard! Who on earth would rely on submission holds while fighting me in the Hub?!

Half resentful and half delirious from pain, I thoughtlessly tapped on the floor. Of course, Jung Garam, who threw away all thoughts of fair-play, ignored the taps and did not loosen up on his forceful hold.

Zzzzt–!

“Ah! It stings!”

Out of nowhere, something that looked like a blue electrical current flowed from my body, and Jung Garam, who clung onto my body and tightened until it was hard to breathe, fell off. While I rubbed at my throat, I guessed that Seo Dawon, sitting next to Kim Olim, had solved my problem for me; I looked at him, thankful.

“Ah, I didn’t turn it off.” However, Seo Dawon said something quite strange.

Jung Garam, behind, grew annoyed, “Honestly, you should have turned off the link while we’re training.”

“Ah-ah. I just forgot since we just recently added to the linked skills. I turned it off, so you can try again.”

“I’m not going to go easy on you, Choi Lee-kyung. Now.”

“W-What are you saying?! What did I do?!”

Jung Garam had been subdued in less than a minute after we began our 1 on 1 tussle–it turned out that one of Seo Dawon’s protective skills had been triggered. Even though I was not at fault, Jung Garam still reamed me harshly for daring to rebel.

Like that, 30 minutes flew by.

“Gasp, gasp….”

“Jung Garam, did you really only use 1/40th of your strength?”

“Of course.”

No matter how desperately I struggled, I couldn’t harm a single hair on Jung Garam’s chin. Furthermore, he had been only using 1/40th of his strength. Jung Garam shook his head, as if to indicate that he couldn’t lower his strength anymore.

Kim Olim stared at me with a grim expression, “Necromancer… Your physical strength is shocking. By my standards, you’re practically at no strength at all. I’m fascinated that you’ve lived like this until now.”

Embarrassed by her admiration–or, more likely, ridicule–I hurried to spit out some excuses, “It’s just, I’m something of a…caster…and Jung Garam is an Assassin…”

“Well then, should I be your opponent?” This time, Seo Dawon stepped up.

Seo Dawon did not aggressively attack like Jung Garam; instead, he defended against my attacks. He allowed my fists to connect a few times, but Kim Olim soon told him to stop going easy on me. Soon, my arms flung uselessly through the air. My speed, compared to his, felt like I was swimming in something rather than traveling through air. I fell down exhausted at the Mage’s feet.

Jung Garam, watching from the back, laughed despicably hard…I wanted to stand up immediately and rush at him, but–not to complain needlessly–I didn’t have the energy to even sit up. Eventually, still collapsed, I could only clench my fists and tremble in anger.

The three servants surrounded me and had a ‘pretend meeting.’ The tone was quite serious and expanded on my shocking lack of ability, but it was obvious that they meant to laugh and tease me.

“Honestly, at this rate, he’ll faint from just the shock of Park Hoseok’s roar,” Seo Dawon said.

Kim Olim nodded, “Hm…Park Ho-seok’s not the problem; he’ll be in danger if he’s exposed to one of the security guards. It’s quite shocking for me too. Sparring…I completely overestimated him. I need to revise the program completely.”

“Pfft… Ah, Dawon-hyung! How was getting punched by Choi Lee-kyung’s fist earlier?”

“I felt like I was being massaged.”

“Right? Hey, Choi Lee-kyung! You said you were weak because you’re a magic-user? Dawon-hyung is a Mage!”

“….Shut the fuck up.” I groaned.

“Pffthahahahaha!”

That’s how Kim Olim’s ambitious sparring program finished that day. And, the next day, the program was forced to pause because, sadly, my body ached and I could hardly move.

* * *

“Haah…”

“I’ve placed the painkillers to the side. Take it after eating the rice porridge.”

Seo Dawon and Lackey were the only ones nursing me as I was left motionless in bed. Seo Dawon made the porridge and brought it on a tray to bed; Lackey, who had been wandering near the bed, rushed to take away the tray. The Mage docilely handed it over.

Lackey stirred the stolen porridge vigorously to cool it down.

Feeling my whole body creak, I rose to check on the skeleton. I had no energy to stop it. “Tha…nks…”

[Clack Clack.]

“Ah, mn. Lackey, you too…”

I hurriedly acknowledged Lackey, who had even stolen the gratitude directed at the Mage. I turned to Seo Dawon, who was still staring at me, once more–did he have anything else to say?

Contrary to my expectations (I had thought he would leave after handing me the porridge), Seo Dawon sat on the bed and looked at me. Lackey looked incredibly displeased, but the Mage paid him no regard.

"What?" I asked.

"I've been thinking… Wouldn't it be better to use the [Possession] skill if the situation were to get dangerous?"

"[Possession]…. Ah?"

A while ago, Seo Dawon had once possessed me on Owl's Ghost ship; perhaps he was talking about that skill.

I wracked through my brain, recalling my forgotten skills. Simultaneously, I remembered Jung Garam's request–his fervent desire to be summoned for this operation.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Training~ Training~

For those that are now realizing how much of an unreliable narrator Lee-kyung-ie is…are you second guessing his words?

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Chapter 125

Chapter 125

“Th-then… Mm! Why don’t we summon Jung Garam–instead of you–this time? Wouldn’t that be better?” Hurriedly eating the spoonfuls of porridge that suddenly approached my mouth, I expressed my opinion and observed the Mage carefully.

Surprisingly, Seo Dawon listened quite seriously to what I had to say before speaking, “In place of [possession]?”

“Ah, Mhmm…”

“Hmm… I guess it would be more annoying to have Jung Garam possess you. He may try to rush ahead with your body.”

“……”

“But, if we don’t allow him to tag along and do something, he may run wild…” Seo Dawon murmured, nodding as if he agreed with me. “Fine. If it’s this much, Jung Garam should understand.”

“R-really? That’s a relief…” I smiled broadly since unexpectedly Seo Dawon listened without much trouble.

However, Seo Dawon looked down at me and asked an unexpected question, “Did Jung Garam put you up to this??”

“Huh? N-no…It’s just…”

Although I denied his accusation reflexively, Seo Dawon's expression let me know that he had already realized I was acting upon Jung Garam's request. Of course, he did not grow angry at me, but he spoke as if he were frustrated, "Jung Garam is prideful and takes great pride in his skills. So, even if he realizes he's being provoked into a trap, he's always confident that he'll be able to escape."

"I-is that so?"

"That's why, while sending him ahead as a scout, I usually sent another person along with him. He needs a calm team member to conduct missions safely."

As the head of the [Red Lotus], Seo Dawon must have understood each of his guild member's personality, strengths and weaknesses better than anyone else. Though he may have portrayed his reasoning as motivated through mission success rate, perhaps he was also concerned about Jung Garam's safety? Recalling how they treated each other like family when they were alive, I had guessed that Seo Dawon would not have treated them so calculatedly.

So his curtness right now may be out of concern for Jung Garam rather than consideration for the success or failure of the mission. I felt a bit sorry that I may have overlooked Seo Dawon's concern–perhaps Jung Garam and I may have misjudged him.

On the other hand, it wasn't as if I couldn't understand Jung Garam's desire to punish the man that killed him. It was hard to bring up a way to reconcile these two understandable but opposing thoughts.

"If Garam-ie fails this time, it becomes that much more difficult for you. Of course, I've taken steps to avoid your death, but…" the mage continued.

"Mmm…"

"This is what I'd like to ask though. Do you believe in Jung Garam to the point where you've resolved to sacrifice your safety…?"

“Ah…”

“If you’re acquiescing simply because Jung Garam begged, you should reconsider.”

I couldn’t immediately answer his straightforward, serious words.

However, the more I considered, Jung Garam’s vivid [memory playback] slowly flooded my mind: the arrogant enemy who made the young assassin go on the defensive with his poor skill compared to his impressive weapon, the shame he felt when the assassin was fooled by Bae Jaemin–someone he considered inferior, the pain and blood filling his throat and torn intestines…Separately, nothing would justify any distrust for Jung Garam’s capabilities.

What’s more, when would the stars align to create a highly opportunistic environment again? Bae Jaemin was currently focused elsewhere, and it was clear that Park Hoseok’s carelessness was the only chance to avenge Jung Garam’s ridiculous defeat.

Eventually, after thinking for a long while, I spoke to Seo Dawon, who was patiently waiting for my response, “I don’t think Jung Garam will lose twice.”

“……”

“I mean, you also said…that he was a genius, right? Um, I don’t exactly know Jung Garam very well, but…”

“……”

“That is to say… I believe in your evaluation of Jung Garam.”

Seo Dawon looked down at my nervous self before giving a small nod. I searched his eyes, wondering if I said the right thing.

Of course, in the meantime, Lackey kept on poking my lips with spoonfuls of porridge, and I had no choice but to eat. When I had finished about half the bowl of porridge, Seo Dawon, who seemed to have been lost

in thought, turned his fathomless eyes back to me. “Then, let’s summon Jung Garam and, afterwards, we should exchange bodies through [Possession]. Speaking of [Possession], you answered wrong during the quiz last time.”

“Huh? The quiz?”

“The quiz that raises the synchronization rate during [Possession].”

As I chewed on the porridge, I began to remember the events that transpired during [Owl’s Ghost ship]. After a while, I managed to remember being asked something strange at the end of our trip, “Ah! That thing…It suddenly asks something about your likes?”

“Yeah. It asked you about my favorite color.”

Ahh! That’s right! And, at that time, I got the question wrong.

Did Seo Dawon also receive a similarly strange question? It was such a casual question, so I pressed the answer without thinking too seriously about it…

But, Seo Dawon’s voice was solemn, indicating that the matter was more important than I had previously thought. “The most important matter in [Possession] is the synchronization rate.”

“I-is that so?”

“The closer to 100 percent, the stronger the synergy between the vengeful ghost and his master–the two can bring forth immense power.” Continuing, Seo Dawon explained about the quiz. “There are many factors involved in raising the synchronization rate. Intimacy and trust between the master and the vengeful ghost have a large impact on the synchronization rate. The quiz is a way to indirectly measure or reflect the intimacy between the two.”

Is that why something weird like ‘What color do you like?’ would appear? I scratched my head, a bit embarrassed, and asked, “You…what

color do you like?”

“I don’t have a particular favorite color.”

“B-but… It said I was wrong when I chose something random…”

“If I were told to choose from choices available, I could choose one.”

Doesn’t that mean he has yet to fully understand his own tastes? I shook my head glumly while trying and failing to remember the exact wording. Would I have to memorize a set of questions and answers like a test?

So, I asked again, “Will the question regarding your favorite color reappear the next time you try to possess me?”

“Who knows. The quiz is probably random.”

“Haah…”

“You don’t have to be so forlorn. There’s many other ways to improve the synchronization rate.” Fortunately, our smart Seo Dawon had other methods to suggest.

Joyfully, I asked, “How?”

“I’ve said how intimacy and trust are important. It’s easier to increase intimacy between two people compared to trust.”

“Ah….. Well then, how do we increase intimacy?”

“However you look at it, it must be skinship.”

“S-skinship?” [1]

The alternative was like a sudden thunderstorm rushing in where there were clear skies before. What do you mean skinship? At that moment, I couldn’t say anything because my mind blanked white.

But, Seo Dawon, words like a bomb, continued, “I don’t think we’ll see a significant increase if we do something insignificant like holding hands…”

“Uh……?”

“At least a hug. Also, I think we should spend at least one hour a day together.”

“W-what?”

“From today, we’re going to have to invest an hour or so in [possession]. We’ll have to rapidly increase the synchronization rate somehow during these two weeks.”

At least a hug…I locked eyes with Seo Dawon for a moment before, unable to stand it, I bowed my head within a second.

I’m supposed to embrace Seo Dawon? For at least an hour a day? Even as I first began to think that was ridiculous, my heart began to beat hard without pride. What should I even say? I couldn’t even express neither eagerness nor dislike…

However, Seo Dawon, without hesitation, reached out to me and my bowed head. He grabbed my jaw and forced me to make eye contact with him; he then hooded his eyes and laughed. “If you dislike hugs, we can do something else that’s more effective.”

“W-what…”

“Don’t you have a rough idea?”

“……” I didn’t want to appear shaken, but I could no longer tolerate those words and stepped backwards to the wall to avoid Seo Dawon’s hand. He docilely let me go.

“Let’s start this evening. We don’t have much time.”

Of course, it was all too embarrassing for me. I forgot my plan to plaster myself to the wall and shouted desperately at Seo Dawon. What on earth, Seo Dawon. You know that I have feelings for you! “W-wait a minute! I still…”

I’m sure he could read my feelings from my wide-open, bewildered eyes, but he continued to say whatever he wished, “Ah, don’t avoid my hand tonight like you just did now. You’ll start with your hands tied if you avoid it.”

And, as if it weren’t a joke, he gave a shadowed smile.

TL: Thanks for being patient you guys, here’s the first part of the multi-chapter update 😀

Footnotes

1. Skinship = physical affection. Touching. You might even say it’s a form of a love language

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Chapter 126

Chapter 126

Seo Dawon leisurely left the room, leaving me in a state of mental breakdown.

–Click

Waiting until I heard the click of the door closing, I ran to the attached bathroom and washed my face with icy water. I could see an embarrassed-reddened face and ears in the bathroom mirror.

‘Seo Dawon, you really… Is he just thoughtless?’ Emotional thoughts rose from within belatedly. You’ve made it clear that you know about my attractions for you, but now you want to initiate skinship with me just for synchronization rate? I, thinking back to Seo Dawon’s behavior which seemed uninterested in the welfare of my heart, began to become angry as I dwelled upon these thoughts.

‘Then I, too, will give Seo Dawon as much as he wants, then. Yes, synchronization rate~. I’ll shut him up myself..or something like that…’

Seo Dawon probably thinks that I would stand still, be unable to do anything… but even I can shut my eyes tight and reach out to him. And since Seo Dawon had no feelings for me, wouldn’t he despise my touch? Usually, when a man gropes another man, fists would fly out first.

‘As a warning, should I once…cling to him?’ I fell into contemplation, squeezing and relaxing my fingers in front of the sink. Of course, I couldn’t

think for long–the door to the bathroom opened quickly, and Jung Garam, cheeks flushed, jumped at me.

“Argh! W-what’s this all of a sudden?” I asked.

“Lee-kyung-ah, how did you persuade hyung? Hm?” Jung Garam gave me a large hug.

Seeing his youthful face so full of excitement, I couldn’t bear to push him away, “No, it was…he wasn’t as opposed as I thought…”

“Really? He didn’t even pretend to listen to me, though…” He grumbled, but he didn’t sound too upset; I grabbed his arm to calm him down. Jung Garam retreated a few steps and stared at me. With a teary voice–as if he were quite moved–he said, “I’ll rip out Park Hoseok’s heart and bring it as a gift.”

“That’s fine, that’s a bit…”

He even acted cute in ways he never did before.

I sighed and pushed at Jung Garam’s back to move him out of the bathroom. However, as soon as I returned to the bedroom, I came upon a shocking scene. Lackey, who until recently had been rattling a spoon in the porridge bowl, was now firmly stuck to the wall by daggers like a pinned butterfly sample.

“W-why’s Lackey like that?!”

[clack clack…]

“Ah, he tried to rush at me because I was entering the room…” Jung Garam said.

Damn it!

I pushed hard at Jung Garam and ran to Lackey, pulling out the daggers that were pinning its joints one by one. Perhaps it was frightened–as soon as it could move, it stuck to my neck and wouldn’t fall off.

No matter how fierce Lackey may be to those that weren't me, Garam was a ranker……! While soothing the skeleton that clung to me, I stared at the younger angrily. Jung Garam only shrugged his shoulders even as he faced my furious gaze.

"Hey, didn't I say not to pick on Lackey?" I shouted.

"I just embedded some daggers into the wall and placed him on top of them."

"Why'd you pin it to the wall? You could just jump and avoid it! Even when you could avoid it–!"

"It's tiresome. It's exhausting to control my strength…" Then he looked at me with an impossibly charming, cute expression. I kicked his shin in a fit of frustration.

"So mean."

After kicking Jung Garam in the butt, he was kicked out of the room while speaking exaggeratedly.

After that, I locked the door and soothed Lackey for a long while. [So depressing], [I hate it!], [I wanna kill them]. I held the skeleton in my arms until its current mood changed to [I love master].

* * *

"I have something serious to tell you."

[Clack clack!]

As soon as it became dinnertime, I called the servants into the living room.

“……”

“……”

“What is it?”

Even though I had gathered them all, saying I had something important to say, all the servants besides Kim Olim had bad attitudes. Jung Garam did not tear his eyes off the TV, and Seo Dawon did not respond, as if he were ignoring me.

However, I didn’t back down and crossed my arms, picking up the remote control to turn off the wildlife documentary that Jung Garam was watching diligently. Jung Garam opened his mouth to protest, but he saw my frown, he closed his mouth. Seo Dawon, who looked a bit absentminded, turned to stare at me–eyes finally focusing.

“You guys…I would like it if you wouldn’t harass Lackey just because I’m not watching.” I said.

“Today was just…”

“If it keeps getting harassed, I will have no choice but to take Lackey everywhere. How will I know what you’ll do to it when my back is turned?”

[Clack Clack!!!!]

“If, from now on, something like today happens again… I’m going to carry Lackey around in my arms no matter what.”

Lackey climbed onto the sofa and jumped wildly, arms raised, as if it were all for this idea.

Of course, compared to the skeleton, the expressions of the other three were chilling. In particular, Jung Garam leaned his head against the back of the sofa. “Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah….!” he sighed, long and discomfited.

Following his sight, Kim Olim spoke, “But, Necromancer. Your skeleton has a serious trigger-bite. Whenever someone just passes close by you, it growls threateningly or snaps at our hands and feet. I haven’t opposed it out of laziness, but, if it weren’t your servant, I would have already removed its jawbone.”

It wasn’t like I couldn’t understand Kim Olim’s point. However, Lackey was perhaps the servant that gave me the most concern–it was originally vulnerable and foolish enough to be chased away by the neighborhood dogs. So, rather than being at fault, I had thought that the others must be doing things to provoke the skeleton.

Moreover, no matter how much stronger Lackey has become, it was ridiculous to compare it to those that were at the peak of human capabilities. Who in their right mind would rip out the claws of kittens just because it scratched them? Likewise, it was unacceptable in my perspective to wholly overpower Lackey just because it rushed at them. “Lackey is incredibly weak compared to you all. If it rushes at you, you can easily avoid it. Why retaliate?”

“Then, let’s do it this way.” Seo Dawon, who had been listening to our argument silently, stood up from his seat. Then, out of nowhere, he approached me and pulled me into his embrace.

Of course, Lackey had lowered itself from the sofa once Seo Dawon had risen from his seat–and rushed to the Mage as soon as he hugged me. Embarrassed, I tried to push Seo Dawon away, but I couldn’t beat him in sheer strength. From somewhere below my waist, I could hear a bloody crunch.

As expected, Lackey was biting with all its might at the fingers that Seo Dawon had purposefully lowered. Looking at his mauled hands, I screamed, “What are you doing! Take your hands away! Lackey, stop!”

However, Lackey did not pay any attention and continued to bite. Seo Dawon, also, did not move and only later raised his hand–if not for the lack of blood, the skin and bones certainly looked broken–and showed it to me. I was stunned by the bite marks left on his skin.

He said, “Like this, I won’t avoid it and let him bite me in the future; don’t you think Lackey needs to be punished as well?”

“P-punishment…”

“The punishment should go to the owner.” And then, Seo Dawon lowered his head towards my neck. Lackey gnashed his teeth; it looked like the skeleton absolutely despised the sight of the Mage clinging so intimately. Perhaps it remembered my order to stop, though, because it begrudgingly stayed still.

Still bowing his head into my neck, he whispered while drawing me completely into his arms, “From now on, if our Lackey attacks for no good reason, Lee Kyung-ie will nurse us until the wound is healed.”

“Th-thats…”

“A wound like this will take about 30 minutes to recover, so I’ll spend that time with Lee-kyung-ie however I please.”

“Oh, agree!” Jung Garam shouted.

“That’s not bad. How about an entire day for an amputation?” Kim Olim said.

Are they insane? I felt both irritated, unable to understand why I’m made to feel guilty, and uneasy while looking at his tattered hand.

Unable to take the wretched sight any longer, Lackey laid prone on the floor, whining. Seo Dawon slowly brought his damaged bones to my eye level, and he actually hugged me for half an hour before releasing me.

When I was released from his embrace, I was able to voice some protest, “You could have…used some shield or defense skills.”

“If you won’t discipline it, at least put a muzzle on.”

“……”

“Isn’t that what an owner has to do?”

Unfortunately, I couldn’t argue against that.

TL: Lee-kyung — “I’ll show you! I’ll give you all the skinship! That’ll teach you!”

Seo Dawon — “All according to plan”

Also, MC hasn’t fully yet realized how dangerous Lackey can be. Hopefully this opened his eyes. Lackey isn’t just a dog but is more of a monster…that also happens to be adorable like a dog. It could cause some serious damage to most humans.

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Chapter 127

Chapter 127

Afterwards, Lackey hung onto my calf for its dear life and buried its face deep into my body. Seo Dawon grabbed my hand and dragged me, regardless of the clinging skeleton, and took me to the living room where the TV was located.

The issue was that he didn't place me on the sofa, but, rather, he pulled me onto his lap. I sat rigidly, frightened, but Seo Dawon whispered calmly as if he expected my reaction, "If you dislike this, then do you want to go to bed?"

In short, if not the living room, then the bedroom. He probably meant to correct the 'synchronization rate' issue from earlier.

I was about to protest, but I gave up and sat stiffly on his lap. Lackey must have despised the thought of being in contact with the Mage; it stared at him resentfully before flopping to its feet a small distance away.

Of course, this situation was very awkward for the others to watch; I felt Kim Olim and Jung Garam pause when they saw us sitting next to each other. Although Kim Olim wrinkled her forehead, she did not deign to interfere.

Jung Garam turned on the TV with the remote control and threw us a question without looking our way. "Are there really so few places to sit on the sofa?"

He sounded subtly irritated. Feeling ashamed, I tried to explain, but Seo Dawon was faster, hugging me quite strongly.

Then, more belligerently, the young assassin raised his voice to retort, “No way. Then, are you enjoying that?”

“……”

Jung Garam had now turned completely in our direction and stared at Seo Dawon. The gleam in his eyes reminded me of a younger brother full of rebellion against his hyung.

After seeing his petulant expression, Seo Dawon fixed his hold on me and murmured, “Since you’ve been whining to Lee-kyung-ie so much, I wanted to try doing it too.”

“……” At those words, Jung Garam, without hiding his irked expression, jumped up from his seat and went to my room. Similarly, Kim Olim, who had her arms folded in front of her, followed the younger into the room. Soon afterwards, the sound of the door banging shut rang loudly throughout the house.

“S-somehow he looked…quite frustrated…” I felt anxious that the three would end up fighting at this rate. Though, I wasn’t too sure what the cause was.

Seo Dawon, as if to reassure me, answered softly, “Well, that’s because they’re all jealous–they’d like to be in my position.”

“In your position? Ah, because of the undead servant’s characteristics…?”

“If that’s what you’d like to think.” Seo Dawon smiled lightly while being quite vague; he suddenly grasped my fingertips and observed my fingernails, bringing them up to eye level. Only then was I conscious of the fact that I was left alone in the living room with the Mage; I turned back towards the TV for no reason–not that I could pay attention to whatever show was on the screen.

“Your heart is beating incredibly fast.”

“……”

Seo Dawon pointed out my fast heartbeat that I had been extremely aware of since a while back. I hesitated, not sure of what I should say, and eventually I ignored him. After all, he already knew how much I liked him.

However, Seo Dawon suddenly placed his hand over my chest. I flinched and looked back; he locked eyes with me.

“Is it because you’ve been stuck to me, like this?” he asked.

“…Why are you asking?”

“I’m curious. To know if you like me that much.”

I was dumbfounded at his most insensitive question, but he didn’t show the tiniest hint of mockery or ridicule in his words. That was to say, this didn’t feel like a trick. His question felt sincere, so I answered, more relaxed now, “You should thank your parents.”

“Haha, because of my face?” Was my question that funny? Seo Dawon began to giggle; he dragged my hands along as he pleased and brought them up to his face.

As soon as my fingers touched him, they retreated as if they were burned by flame. The mage pulled them back without letting them go. He murmured, with an ambiguous smile, “If all you’re attracted to is my outer appearance, then why are you avoiding me?”

“……”

“You look scared even at the slightest touch.” Simultaneously, Seo Dawon kept on looking at me–as if he were letting me know that the shallow walls I put up between us meant nothing.

He slowly thumbed my speechless lips. Once again, I turned away from him.

Seo Dawon smiled quietly, as if he knew this would happen. “Just how much do you like me for you to be this nervous?”

“Don’t kid yourself! [1] I-It’s just that your face is my type… You’re so despicable–I don’t like you.” I managed to muster my annoyance enough to make a response, but, by that time, it felt too late to recover the initiative. Regardless of my claim to dislike him, Seo Dawon leaned his head onto my arms. It was as if he were saying, ‘Even if I do this, you won’t push me away though.’

What a despicable thing to do. However, it was true that I hoped that this situation–him hugging onto me as if he were hanging onto my very being–would last just a little longer.

“Then, why do you stare at me like that when I’m cooking?” the mage asked.

“B-because I’m hungry…”

“When I hand you the food, you look as if you’re caught between wanting and not wanting to eat.”

“Only the smell was good, it was tasteless otherwise.”

“That’s too much… I guess I need to work harder.” [2]

I pretended to be calm, but frankly I was ashamed of myself. I had no idea that I was staring so much at the mage while he was cooking for me.

Just…For someone who could call upon great power or skill with one flip of the palm to look so serious while flipping eggs on a frying pan… The gap was just kind of cute… I just glanced once or twice, that was it…

Perhaps, was he someone sensitive to others’ gazes? No, if he knew I was stealing glances at him, then he should have told me to stop. Why must he always keep everything a secret until the time came to insidiously point it out?

I had already realized that I was starting to get pulled into Seo Dawon’s orbit, but, as if I were trapped, I couldn’t move away. Seo Dawon always acted kindly like this… That guy was probably playing around with me– but, whenever he acted like he had feelings, I…

“Sometimes it’s nice to sit still like this,” the mage murmured.

“……”

“You feel the same way.”

I…felt the urge to fall deeply for him.

Today, especially, it was hard to resist. I couldn’t get enough of his shamelessness–his audacity to hug me despite knowing of my feelings for him. I said what I said, but why couldn’t I truly convince myself of the Mage’s despicableness? Was it because I was someone who had no guts? [3]

However, any such self-discipline could not stop the Mage’s hand from grabbing the back of my head and pulling it towards him.

Before Seo Dawon’s lips hit mine, his mouth curled into a smile, and he gazed at me. Behind his red and fathomless eyes, the thought that the gleam in those eyes meant that he was laughing at me, was unexpectedly hot. So, eventually, I closed my eyes. Soon, a chilly tongue slowly invaded my mouth.

* * *

After dying at the <Tower of Command>, the system handed me a single scenario.

[Would you like to proceed with the scenario, ‘The Demon King of Revenge‘?]

I snorted in disbelief–what a cruel joke to those lingering in death. Are you telling me, who had lived as a User until this moment, to live a new life as a monster?

I tried to flatly refuse, but there was no rejection button for this scenario. Only the [Accept] button was left. Afterwards, the system ominously informed, [If conditions are met, the scenario will proceed automatically.]

Since death, most status windows were blocked, and there was no way to reject this [Demon King of Revenge] scenario. So, without accepting, I placed the notification far off in the corner of my view and wasted a long time trapped in this mental space and unable to perceive the passage of time.

I thought of many different schemes. At first, I was preoccupied with ways to revive my body, but soon I accepted that I had to let go of that dream.

I needed to find a way to convey to the outside world this after-death situation. However, I could think of no method that could affect the present–what seemed to be a different dimension set apart from the dead. Even if I were to drop dozens of [Meteors], the spell couldn’t touch even the tiniest grain of sand in the dungeon.

And, everytime I used a skill, the [Demon King of Revenge] scenario continued to update. For the first time, I felt a distant despair in the face of this macabre urge to give up and return to a meaningless existence.

Then, one day.

[We admire your patience and evanescent integrity.]

[Special benefits have been added to the ‘Devil King of Revenge’ scenario.]

[If you fulfill the scenario now, we can grant access to the ‘Akashic Records’ up to Level-5 Demigod (need a word other than Level).] [4]

[We will lift the embargo on the legendary staff carried by ‘Queen Pinbara’]

Dozens of notifications–as if the system were urgently distributing coupons for a game that wouldn’t sell–began to fill my view.

After seeing these messages, I put them all out of sight. There was no doubt that while I hadn’t selected to continue, some serious loophole to this scenario must have appeared.

And, as I removed all the notifications from sight…

Crash–!

A man fell down someplace next to me.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: That’s the last of the three-chapter update! Thank you Sleeplessqiuqiu and LeoHP for the Kofi!!

Also, I lost the best (And so did my PRs) T_T Those of you who guessed Seo Dawon for first kiss won! (And straight into french kiss at that >///<) This also marks the start of a multi-chapter mini-arc detailing Seo Dawon’s perspective. More than giving us his thoughts, it really does uncover some interesting details about this world.

Thank you for reading~

Footnotes

1. would be literally “don’t laugh” or “don’t be ridiculous.” However, like with everything, Korean is contextual.
2. Seo Dawon here does mean to say to work harder in cooking, but the nuance of the word is more pertaining to emotional matters.
3. = sort of a vulgar way to say intestines. Something to note here is that Lee-kyung is really down on himself–the language really shows the lack of self-esteem.
4. The Akashic records are a compendium of all human events, thoughts, words, emotions, and intent ever to have occurred in the past, present, or future in theosophy or anthroposophy. I’ll explain these philosophies more in the comments. The Akashic Records are a collection of everything, not just human. They contain everything that has possibly had sentience. Theorists for this philosophy believed these records existed in some mental plane (think collective unconsciousness) and that one could reach it through enlightenment.

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Chapter 128

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At first, I didn’t think he was a User–after all, there were tangled, white bones where the head should’ve been.

However, as soon as the bone mass collided with the floor, it shattered and scattered; the face of the young man hidden behind it was finally revealed. It was a face I had never seen before. However, since he may be someone related to Lim Jisoo or Bae Jaemin, I decided to meticulously scrutinize him.

“Co-ough…”

There was no severe trauma on the outside, but the man was bleeding from his nose. Even after he had returned to consciousness, I suspected he had a concussion–he couldn’t maintain an upright balance.

Soon afterwards, though, he shook his fist in the air and unfurled it; in his palm was a commonly used recovery potion. I was sure he was a user just from that.

Then, with his shaking arms, the man looked down at his slightly twisted wrist, sighed, and opened a new potion bottle. Strangely enough, he didn’t go on to contact his fellow colleagues he must have entered the <Tower of Command> with, nor check his current location, nor examine his weapons…

“What’s this…” he gasped–a strange sound. He picked up and examined the [light] item from the floor. From then on, I felt a bit stifled (is this the

correct word? Uncomfortable? restless? I don’t know the perfect english word but I know this word in Korean) with his actions.

‘I don’t know how long I’ve been stuck here, but…’

However, before I died, didn’t the difficulty mandate that the <Tower of Command> be accessed by Users at least level 80 or higher?

Let alone level 80, the man I was watching could not have been level 50 from his slow movements and his naive behavior. In addition, he directed the [light] in the same direction constantly–his manner of searching was futile.

No, to be exact, he was like someone who had never explored and investigated before; in gaming terms, he had a newbie’s unique clumsiness. He seemed to be working hard, but it seemed to be, to say it lightly, a waste of time?

Watching him dither around meaninglessly for dozens of minutes, I wondered how many times this guy would have died if there were any active monsters–like those I encountered before my death–around.

‘He probably would have died once every 30 seconds?’

Nevertheless, this man was special to me.

[A special benefit has been added to the ‘Demon King of Revenge‘ scenario]

[If you proceed with the scenario now, you obtain the ‘Wise Man’s robe’ that contains the ‘Star’s Orbit’]

[If you proceed with the scenario now, the Demon King’s henchman–Succubus Lupetia, will be fully loyal to you.]

Why? Because the system, as if it were undergoing a seizure, threw new perks at me, enticing me to accept the scenario, whenever I looked at that man.

Of course, I had no intention of becoming a dungeon boss and a monster, but I needed to consider the meaning of the scenario further. Especially with how it came into view, trying to steal away my attention from the man.

Thus, I concluded this:

‘If I were to get entangled with that man, the [Demon King of Revenge] scenario will not develop or will be batted away.’

Otherwise, there would be no reason to flood my view with dozens of messages to accept immediately.

However, the identity of the man was still unknown; I was frustrated from my inability to do anything but observe him.

However, I soon learned that there was no need for me to step in. Searching this dungeon properly would lead to [a new discovery], which would help lead to the next step. Only when certain actions had been made, the [a new discovery] alert would be renewed, furthering progression.

Although the man was slow, he seemed to find the [new discovery] and followed it diligently in his own way. Then, he stepped on the broken staff and tripped over it. One step ahead of him, I had found the corpse ahead and had been examining it.

“Did a monster do this?”

The issue was…the corpse was something that imitated my death. The same with the tattered robe wrapped around the body, the collapsed posture, and the recently discovered broken staff…these were all clues that were indexical of my death.

As soon as I saw that sight, I turned to the man, who was just staring at it with fear; he didn’t show any signs of agitation or acknowledgement.

Was he truly someone irrelevant to my death? While I was still full of suspicion that was soon becoming uncertain, the man followed the trail of [new discoveries] to my corpse.

“Urgh, I guess I have to take it out.”

While hesitating, he cringed and touched the black wedge stuck in my corpse’s back.

He plucked it out; simultaneously, I felt an extreme pain–one I hadn’t felt in many years–spread from my back. I crumpled, unable to make sounds at the fiery pain. But, something weirder than that appeared in front of me.

[‘D※mon ♠ng’ Sce…n…….r…….o…….◇]

The scenario window for the [Demon King of Revenge] scenario, which had been persistently dodging my view, gradually became transparent and soon deteriorated until it was unreadable.

[A new scenario has been added.]

[You can now begin the scenario, ‘A Summons After Death’]

[The scenario ‘Demon King of Revenge’ will now proceed automatically if the ‘A Summons After Death’ scenario fails. Currently, that scenario is in a locked state.]

And, as soon as that window disappeared, a new message appeared. Pushing through the torturous pain, I pressed the button that would manifest a further detailed explanation for the new scenario.

The grade of the scenario, [A Summons After Death] was classed at SSS grade–a first of its kind from what I could see. There was even no guidance on how to progress with the scenario or information on achievement conditions.

However, below, the reward was clearly listed.

[Reward: It may be possible to completely and perfectly resurrect the dead party]

‘….The reward is resurrection?’

I opened my eyes wide. I’d refused to become a monster so far, but I didn’t dare to dream that I could live a new life again. I had just hoped to not turn insane–that was all. If I were to be left in this situation for eternity, I was afraid that I would eventually succumb to the allure of becoming a monster, an escape…

Wouldn’t it be better to disappear into nothingness? The long days of worries and agony passed my mind–If I couldn’t survive, then I’d want to let those I cared about in the outside world know of this situation and disappear cleanly. That was all I could hope for.

Resurrection.

As if an asphyxiating person had received a respirator, I began to breathe heavily. The pain that was still lingering in my back began to feel sweet. The pain was like I…

It made me feel like I’d already returned to life.

However there was no acceptance button for the [A Summons after Death] scenario, and I was still trapped in this mental world, same as before. The system window remained the same. As soon as I realized that the answer did not lay within my hands, I immediately looked around the

surroundings. Soon after the man held the black wedge within his hands, he collapsed, and I found myself face to face with an unconscious, pallid-faced man.

The moment I saw his face, I was sure.

‘This man is the core of the scenario.’

Time, previously frozen, had begun to flow again ever since he fell in front of me. I looked down at the unconscious man and reached out to him. However, contrary to my expectations, my hands couldn’t even touch the man. However, even though we did not touch, the man frowned and muttered as if I had touched him.

“Seo Dawon…”

My name unexpectedly popped out of his mouth.

He murmured my name as if he knew me. I had never seen him. But, just in case, I observed his face meticulously again.

He looked a bit younger than me–did he just recently turn 20? I don’t think my guess was too far off given the bumbling appearance he showed before he collapsed.

I had no knowledge of his level or class… He had no defining weapon nor specific body features that could be a marker. I could only shallowly remove certain classes, ‘I’m guessing he isn’t a Warrior…?’

Then, suddenly, the man convulsed; he breathed in raggedly as if he were being strangled. I reached out my hand to help, but, frustratingly, I could do nothing.

TL: Imagine being turned into a monster that Users kill after death–honestly this is basically dystopia.

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“Nngh….”

I had watched the man nervously for quite a while. When I became doubtful as to whether or not he stopped breathing, the man suddenly opened his eyes. As soon as his eyes opened, his body began to twist in some invisible suffering.

“Cough, cough….urgh…!”

At first, I thought the man was poisoned, so I carefully examined the color of his lips and his fingertips. It must be so painful–I felt frustrated inside, wanting to say to him that he must drink a potion quickly.

However, as I kept watching, it felt as if the man were narrowly escaping from a long nightmare rather than convulsing from being poisoned. Even as he started to retch, he didn’t vomit blood.

‘It’s like he’s been exposed to a mental curse or is besieged by hallucinations…Since he’s unable to alert himself, this must be the first time he’s experienced such attacks.’

Just as I had that thought, I was able to guess what scene the man must be experiencing while unconscious.

‘As I expected, is he seeing my death? No, It’s more damaging than merely being an observer. Seeing as how he’s squirming and bending his neck from the pain, there’s a possibility he’s experiencing a [transference] of the mind…’

“Is this why…they call it a ‘vengeful ghost contract?'” The man spoke, possibly fed up with all that had happened. I could finally guess at his class.

‘Necromancer?’

With that guess, a system message manifested before my eyes.

[The first quest in the ‘A Summons After Death’ scenario will proceed now.]

[Start life a deceased person by contracting with a Necromancer]

[Success Conditions: Signing a contract with a Necromancer; leaving the [Tower of Command] with your contracted Necromancer safely.]

[Failure Conditions: Failure to sign with the Necromancer; the Necromancer’s death.]

[From this point onwards, you may show yourself in front of the Necromancer.]

[Additional Points can be earned if the contract is written in your favor.]

The scenario began.

Of course, at first I did not move one inch. First, I turned down the fate of becoming a demon king, now it was asking me to become another User’s slave…I closed my eyes from the humiliation–so large a scale I have never felt such shame before–and opened them again, but the system message had not changed.

‘Does this punk know about this?’

So, naturally, my anger latched onto the Necromancer, who still had such a silly look upon his face.

However, the man looked far too weak for me to vent my anger at him. When I saw him sniffling–how he stood ignorant to his own tears–the

bloodlust that swelled up hopelessly scattered. Even I, the one directly involved in this incident, did not cry like that at my death.

The man, who sat rubbing his eyes with a blank expression, did not seem like a beneficiary of this system but rather a distressed man who was swept away by the tide of disaster and drifted ashore here. I glared at him while thinking about my next steps.

"…I'm so sorry, Seo Dawon-nim…" The man suddenly muttered quietly.

I wondered why he called my name like that–with eyes shut tightly and face stained with guilt. However, at that moment, I began to feel the presence of several people above our heads, and a familiar voice could be heard from that group. The man must have heard the same sound–he faltered and retreated, face white with fear.

"I'm really working my ass off coming here just because you've been having disturbing dreams–you insane fool."

"……"

"It's not as if you're some fortune teller or a prophet."

Surprisingly, it was Bae Jaemin and Lim Jisoo.

Of course, I had expected that I'd be reunited with them someday…but I hadn't expected that day to come so soon.

So, like the man, I stepped reflexively back into a shaded location and laughed bitterly. Because, I had forgotten for a brief moment that I was dead and those two couldn't see me. Perhaps, no matter what I were to do, they wouldn't notice me; likewise, no matter what attack I were to cast, it wouldn't reach them.

'[Reverse Gravity].'

Nevertheless, I extended my fingertips at them and cast a skill over their heads. That skill crushed the enemy's heads in thousands of battles and

made them bow at my feet. However, this time, the skill simply swirled over their heads for a short while before quickly losing all power and scattering.

Even as I tried out the skill, I knew what would happen. No matter how much power I had, the dead me could not affect them at all. When I double-checked this fact with my own eyes, the hatred that had temporarily cooled with time flowed forth from the deepest depths of my heart; my fingertips were uncontrollably shaking.

‘Right now, I’m… lower than a bug.’

Wouldn’t a mosquito be a more annoying existence to them now?

I tried to calm down my agitated mind, closing and opening my eyes, which would have probably reddened with bloodlust if I were to have a physical form. Simultaneously, I turned to that frightened Necromancer. I really didn’t want to admit it, but…

‘I need you.’

I could perceive why the man called my name and apologized. After seeing all my memories, he must have felt compassion but had no desire to join this huge conflict.

I didn’t want to reproach his superficial compassion. At a single glance, one could tell he was a newbie with little dungeon experience–on top of that he chose the Necromancer class for himself…His life must have been hard in its own way.

However, seeing as he was a Necromancer, he was stuck in a situation where he could not escape from Bae Jaemin on his own devices. I thought, perhaps romantically, his series of wrong choices may have been all for me.

It all matched too well for mere coincidence.

‘What would he think?’

Laughing, I whispered into his ear.

–You want to get away from here safely?

I wanted to seem as relaxed as possible, framing my ruinous fate as his salvation.

* * *

I won an advantageous contract in return for saving the man, who hung onto me, saying he didn't want to die. In fact, I wasn't obligated to anything, and the contract only required me to protect his back. Seeing as how Choi Lee-kyung signed so hastily, I wondered whether it was his first time signing such a contract.

[You've succeeded in signing a fraudulent contract that no one with any conscience would create! A large number of bonus points will be added.]

I set aside the message–I couldn't tell if it was praising me or being sarcastic–and looked at the left ring finger. There, in the same location as Choi Lee-kyung, the symbol of the contract was engraved.

It was a memento of a slave contract, but, after signing, I didn't feel as bad as I had expected. I didn't know if that was because the contract was overtly in my favor or because Choi Lee-kyung was simply too stupid to trigger my wariness… In any case, I saved him from Bae Jaemin as the contract demanded; Choi Lee-kyung turned around and made eye contact with me as soon as Bae Jaemin disappeared.

But, the moment he saw me, he paused as if his soul left his body.

"I… Who are you?" he said.

Pressing down my frustration, I answered Choi Lee-kyung's pathetic question, "Who do you think I am?"

"What! Oh! This voice…W-What happened?"

Rather, I couldn't understand what Choi Lee-kyung was talking about. Did he always see me as a skeleton? I was far too lazy to explain anything,

so instead I waved the hand where the contract was located and stepped closer.

It was funny–I showed the contract seal in order to shut him up, but Choi Lee-kyung grabbed at my hand, pressing and tickling it. I wondered what kind of trick he was setting, but I didn't want to admit that I was feeling a bit sensitive. I calmly let him grab my hand.

"Why are you groping… ha…Don't grope at me…"

"G-Grope?!!"

Of course, I was frustrated because he held onto me unceasingly [1]; still, I tried to resist snapping. Fortunately, Choi Lee-kyung shook my hands off, greatly surprised, with that small amount of reproach. But, when we locked gazes again, an even more embarrassing flood of system messages appeared in front of my eyes.

[The equipped item, 'Thebes' Coronet,' alluring effect has been invoked.]

[Curse – Due to the alluring effect, opponents that suffer from large power gaps can't make preemptive strikes.]

['Choi Lee-kyung' feels an inexplicable attraction and curiosity towards you.]

Wearable items were popular due to their combat capabilities. The high charm value of the item prompted an alarm that Choi Lee-kyung had developed a small bit of interest in me. But, no way…I didn't know these items would work against Users as well.

'It activates regardless of the two's gender?'

[Thebes' Coronet] was a useful item for Mages–it would become very difficult for them if they drew aggro in dungeons.

Due to the high supplemental charm values, this item had the effect of slowing down upcoming low-class enemies. However, this usefulness was commonly invoked against enemies–the effect had never been invoked with allies, as it had just now.

I considered the cause for a short while, and I concluded that [Thebes' Coronet] was quiet because I usually travelled with companions with comparable levels. Charm skills were most efficient when the gap between me and the opponent was quite far. Of course, it wouldn't work for allies at similar levels…

'It's already looking dismal.'

I pulled up Choi Lee-kyung's status window and winced. Furthermore, what was with that strange phrase in the previous system notifications? Inexplicable attraction and curiosity? Perhaps my mind was in the gutter [2] or perhaps my guess was in the right ballpark; the nuance was a bit…

'No way, he's not going to ask to sleep with me, right?'

It's not that I've never received advances from men before, but I was a bit flustered because I've never held any interest in that team. If Choi Lee-kyung were a woman, I would have considered him…

So I drew a line between us while disguising it as a joke, "Even if I'm your servant, I'll be in a predicament if you ask for those kind of services from me…"

"W-What are you even saying!"

Still, I was a little relieved to see Choi Lee-kyung's embarrassment. Emotionally, wasting time or chasing flings was only worth doing while alive; I had no time now.

On top of that, Choi Lee-kyung's immediate denial, even if it were dishonest, was also a relief. Even if he were to really develop feelings later, he probably wouldn't bother me much.

[The second quest in the ‘A Summons After Death’ scenario will now proceed.’]

[Obtain all the ‘Vengeful Ghost Essences’ of your old companions.]

[Success Condition: Acquire two or more vengeful ghost essences.]

[Failure Condition: Failure to gather even one vengeful ghost essence.]

[Extra points will be received for collecting all ‘Vengeful Ghost Essences’.]

However, as soon as I saw the following system messages, all commotion caused by the charm effect was soon forgotten.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Neither Lee-kyung nor the readers knew it at the time, but Dawon was feeling quite vulnerable–and still probably is feeling vulnerable. He’s doing a fair bit of bluffing to seem knowledgeable to give himself security despite the fact that he’s learning about this alongside Choi Lee-kyung and only really has the advantage of a system guiding him. It really calls to mind the “Loyalty: extremely low” that Choi Lee-kyung first saw in Dawon’s profile. Interestingly enough Dawon wasn’t necessarily attracted to men at first and had thought all this was because of his items…but you guys can see how that changes in the future 😛

Footnotes

1. The original said , which means unceasingly. It also means day and night without rest :P

2. Originally, the idiom is “rotten brain,” but that’s the same thing as having your brain in the gutter.

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The second quest of the new scenario [A Summons After Death], which arrived like a salvation after the [Demon King of Revenge] scenario was suspended, had appeared.

Believing in the scenario and its reward of ‘complete resurrection,’ I signed a [vengeful ghost contract] with this Necromancer ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ who suddenly appeared before me. I thought I had finally escaped the circumstances by which I became a monster–a mere puppet–but the situation, after seeing the second quest, was not so simple.

Dwelling, I couldn’t help but think that the second quest framed me as not someone who retains their human ego as ‘Seo Dawon,’ but rather an item that serves a purpose in a game, like the Herb.

‘…Is it asking me to persuade my dead companions to become servants like me?’

Furthermore, I couldn’t shake the idea that this quest was more for Choi Lee-kyung’s sake than for mine.

I’ve signed the contract in my favor for now, but as time goes by, Choi Lee-kyung will surely slowly realize…exactly whose leash he has absolute control over.

‘What kind of attitude will Choi Lee-kyung take then?’

My mind could only conjure pessimistic imaginations. After all, I knew how violent people turned to those who had no recourse against them.

However, if I ignored this quest, I would fail to revive and eventually fall into becoming a mere monster. Perhaps one day, Bae Jaemin would visit my dungeon, break my neck, and receive my dropped item–something like the [Demon King Set].

That's why I couldn't easily move forth once again and looked around the empty, sandy dungeon with complicated feelings. Whether it's to sink into ruin now or make my friends suffer in vain later…there were only two choices fit for stray dogs… [1]

"……There's something I need to find here."

However, right now I had too little information or power to counter the [A Summons After Death] scenario.

And, seeing how Bae Jaemin and Lim Jisoo seemed perfectly fine and alive, they would have progressed to greater heights of power while I stagnated here. The overwhelming difference between our abilities in the past was likely to have been made smaller, or perhaps I was already lagging behind.

Eventually, I had no choice but to make a decision. Staring at Choi Lee-kyung–who stared back, eyes wide open–I quietly pressed at the updated system message.

[There are a total of 6 'Vengeful Ghost Essences' you have yet to find. Current status: 0/6]

[Necromancer blood is a necessary ingredient for the 'Vengeful Ghost Essence']

[The spell for 'Blood Hunting' using the Necromancer's blood has been added below.]

[Skill, ‘Blood Hunting,’ can be learned.]

However, the notification informed that Choi Lee-kyung’s blood was needed to call forth the [Vengeful Ghost Essence].

It wasn’t so surprising to hear that the contractor’s blood was needed; Dark and Evil attribute skills typically had those tendencies. But, I had concerns about whether or not Choi Lee-kyung would cooperate.

‘How should I coax you?’ Several possible statements floated in my head, but I decided to speak straightforwardly for now.

“You know that my guild members died with me, right?”

Choi Lee-kyung opened his eyes round like a rabbit and soon nodded.

“I believe they’re also sealed in this ‘Vengeful Ghost’ state.”

Choi Lee-kyung listened to my following story quite seriously, but he stared at me, bewildered, when he heard that his blood was needed. I felt a bit of pity for him–he looked so scared, like someone who had accidentally fallen into this dungeon.

“I don’t have a potion right now; I’ll die if I get hurt as badly as before…”

“You don’t need to bleed until you’re half-dead, like before.” So, before I realized it, I said something quite cheesy, as if I were trying to comfort him. “…After all, you have me now.”

Of course, I realized how uncharacteristic I sounded after I said it…Choi Lee-kyung’s relieved expression pierced at my conscience.

“Haah……”

In any case, he believed me and stood at the place where the [Vengeful Ghost Essence] was likely to be, gripping a dagger over his hand and

trembling.

I would have been annoyed at any other guy who made such a fuss about something that amounts to nothing more than a slap on the wrist, but… strangely, Choi Lee-kyung's frightened face elicited feelings of sympathy more than annoyance. Thoughts like 'Would it be better for me to slice a line for him instead if he's that afraid?' raced through my brain.

"If you're afraid, I can do it for you?"

"…It's fine."

However, when I tried to help, his pride seemed to have been bothered; I didn't try to interfere any more. Nevertheless, the sight of him struggling to draw a line on his palm without opening his eyes was a bit amusing.

Another problem appeared though. From the moment Choi Lee-kyung tore his flesh with the dagger, a unique scent wafted through the air. It smelled quite different from the fishy smell of blood that I've come to know and expect; the more I smelled it, the more saliva I produced? It's been a long time since I've lost my body–I thought I've transcended from any desires that stem from my appetite.

I was momentarily flustered, but I tried to use the skill provided by the scenario, 'Blood Hunting,' while trying to maintain an indifferent expression.

As soon as 'Blood Hunting' was used, however, the hunger became several times worse. Of course, Choi Lee-kyung, who knew nothing, was calling out to the [Vengeful Ghost Essences] with all his might, dripping blood all over the floor. I had the vague thought, 'what a waste' while looking at that blood; soon, though, I returned to my senses and cringed.

Ah, fuck. Why is a servant drooling over his Necromancer's blood? Isn't there something wrong with the desire to eat your owner? Or, was this eventually inevitable for the servants as they are undead without physical forms.

I remembered from my dungeon-raiding memories where the zombie-like undead approached people while drooling heavily, and my disgust intensified. Isn't the hunger I'm feeling right now similar to their intensity and situation?

However, Choi Lee-kyung, knowing nothing of my condition, shed tears persistently from the pain and followed me with a blank face. For some reason, even though I was unbearably tempted to bite into that neck, his clumsy attitude abated those feelings.

Eventually, I stopped walking in front of him and turned to look back at him. Choi Lee-kyung had been following so closely behind me that my pause almost made him run into me; he jumped and stared back.

"By the way, how old are you?"

I asked him a question to change my cognition of the other away from a slab of meat.

"I'm 24…" Choi Lee-kyung seemed embarrassed by my sudden investigation, but he soon murmured shyly, rubbing his moist eyes with the back of his hand. I was surprised–he was three or four years older than what I expected. After some calculations, I realized he was the same age as me.

When I remarked on that fact, Choi Lee-kyung immediately asked, "You're kidding, right?"

Just as I was surprised that Choi Lee-kyung was older than I had thought, Choi Lee-kyung must have also thought that I was older than my actual age. Despite the fact that we made the same misjudgment, I pretended none of that happened and instead asked in return, "?? Are you telling me that I look old?"

"Ah–No…It's not that…! Are you really the same age as me?"

"Yeah. But now that you know my age, you're speaking informally."

"Um, Sir……?"

How funny. The appetite that had slowly been building up–to the point where my stomach was churning with desire–had gradually subsided; I smiled as I looked down at Choi Lee-kyung. “It’s good to be the same age. Speak comfortably.”

“Were you really born in the year XX?”

“Yeah.”

“Really?”

“Do I really look old enough for you to be continuously asking this annoying question?”

Choi Lee-kyung flinched, but it seemed he realized that I was merely joking. He pulled up beside me and started walking along without any indications of feeling bad. His steps were lighter than before; perhaps conversing eased his tension.

Secretly sighing in relief, I watched as the crown of his head gently rocked with each step. I didn’t want to believe that just a few minutes ago I wanted to eat something like this, and a vain laugh involuntarily tumbled out.

‘As soon as we escape from here, I’ll have to investigate the Necromancer first.’

Apparently, Choi Lee-kyung was ignorant. If he had known, he wouldn’t be playing around so defenselessly… So, rather than confessing to him what I was feeling, I let the hour hand of the clock turn endlessly without conflict.

However, unlike how I tried so deliberately not to turn my gaze towards him, Choi Lee-kyung kept glancing my way even as he pretended otherwise. Is his interest in me rising because I’ve treated him well? I thought it was because of the charm effect, but I had temporarily unequipped [Thebes’ Coronet]; I had no idea why Choi Lee-kyung was acting this way towards me. While I contemplated, he suddenly stumbled.

“Mnngh!”

And made such strange noises.

I reflexively pulled him towards me; as he came closer, the faint smell of blood made my heart beat rapidly. I was sick and tired, utterly annoyed, at the sensation, so I bluntly rebuked Choi Lee-kyung, “That’s why you should look at where you’re going instead of staring at me.”

TL: We’ll touch upon the topic of hunger again soon. It’s pretty horrifying.

Footnotes

1. The english equivalent for this idiom may be similar to being “stuck between a rock and a hard place.

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As expected, Choi Lee-kyung was embarrassed with even this much teasing and endeavored to not look at me afterwards. Even so, he could not resist leaving his hand in my hold.

I had not let go of his wriggling hand on purpose; I was gradually getting to know Choi Lee-kyung's personality while looking down at his hesitating self.

'On the sensitive and timid side… And he seems to have low self-esteem.'

Seeing his passive and naive attitude–hesitating to ask questions and closing his mouth before letting his opinions be known–it was obvious that Choi Lee-kyung had not interacted with others much. He had no idea what to do with this small amount of teasing. He obviously had much curiosity with the person he signed a contract with, but he did not take the initiative to ask about me.

So, I asked Choi Lee-kyung about his relations to confirm my assumption: things like, whether he's a member of a guild or information on his close friends. As I had thought, Choi Lee-kyung did not belong to a group, and he had no friends with whom he interacted intimately.

Furthermore, he was clean, but wore inexpensive clothes and equipment that didn't look particularly well-kitted–his financial situation must not be very self-sufficient. Normally when one enters a dungeon far beyond your

ability, the User would wear expensive equipment that would match the level of the dungeon.

However, Choi Lee-kyung did not own a single piece of equipment that seemed decent at a single glance. Even taking into account his Necromancer class, he wasn't even wearing rings that most caster-types wore…Obviously, it meant he had no money.

An impoverished loner who had no friends nor anyone to contact regularly…

'There wouldn't be a problem if I were to confine him?'

At that moment, that thought briefly crossed my mind. But, I didn't think any deeper since I assumed that would only happen in the worst case scenario. Of course, it was better for me that Choi Lee-kyung was a loner– his situation was easier to handle.

I had the desire to curtail Choi Lee-kyung's testy attitude, looking at his situation. Now that all's said and done, perhaps I would be able to comfortably buy his favor in the future. While we chatted, Choi Lee-kyung's stiff expression slowly relaxed; before we reached the last [Vengeful Ghost Essence], he had smiled slightly at my jokes.

'The issue is, Choi Lee-kyung has to slice his palms yet again…'

After confirming the location where the [Vengeful Ghost Essence] was located, I tried to preemptively use all sorts of skills to block odors. And when I felt that Choi Lee-kyung was putting too much force in his grip, I took the dagger from him. If he were to poke too deeply and blood were to well out, my rationality may become paralyzed.

So, I split his palm on his behalf. The smell of his blood rising above that small cut grabbed all my attention and made me feel momentarily drowsy–it was as if an overripe fruit was bursting from its own ripeness. Sadly, I could not escape the influence of this unusual scent even if I tried to block the smell or cut shallowly.

Of course Choi Lee-kyung, still ignorant of my condition, placed his cut palms on the ground and leaned over in front of me. His posture left his pale, white neck unprotected. I reached out my hands, as if I were possessed, but I managed to return to my senses; however, my hand was already placed on top of Choi Lee-kyung's head.

"Why my hair…!"

Choi Lee-kyung was predictably offended, asking why I suddenly felt fit to touch his head.

"I said, don't move." I pretended to be playful, for I had nothing else to say. Even as I stroked his hair, I was aware that I wanted to bite the head of a living person and was simply suppressing that urge.

Fortunately, after obtaining the last [Vengeful Ghost Essence], the blood's influence disappeared as if the scent had been washed away. But, in the back of my brain, I still remembered the moment when I had cut Choi Lee-kyung's palm–the scene repeated again and again, like when I had first watched porn.

The fact that I was excited by such a scene was revolting and strange. However, it did not seem like something that could be stopped by mere reason and was, instead, an essential change brought about by the contract. I didn't want to admit that I wasn't human anymore in this matter, but…

'No matter what happens in the future…Choi Lee-kyung shouldn't be injured.'

Eventually, I resolved to prevent any future harm… But, it was impossible for Users who fought monsters to avoid bloodshed. Even now, it was concerning to try and safely bring Choi Lee-kyung out of the [Tower of Command] without a scratch. I involuntarily sighed deeply.

* * *

Fortunately, Choi Lee-kyung met with and safely rejoined his original party–they had been wandering around searching for him–overshadowing my current worries.

Choi Lee-kyung had seemed quite shocked that his other party members couldn't perceive me. For me, it was more advantageous to not be seen, so I stayed calm.

However, I was bothered by Kim Sangyoon, the leader of the party.

"You're not hurt anywhere?"

"Huh? Yeah……I mean, I was hurt just once…but I healed myself with potions."

"What happened beneath the lake? Ji-hwan said he lost contact with you, so we spent about an hour searching for you there dude."

Just what part of those words touched Choi Lee-kyung's sentimentality? At first, the necromancer responded awkwardly to Kim Sangyoon, but then his cheeks suddenly blushed red at that cursory concern; he began answering whole-heartedly.

Having already checked Choi Lee-kyung's stat, I knew he wouldn't be in a favorable hierarchy in this party. At best, he must have joined an acquaintance's party or he must have paid money to be carried. Kim Sangyoon's words right now revealed, rather than his anxiety over the Necromancer's status, his frustration that the Necromancer moved to a different location.

"From now on, stick close to me. Alright?"

"Yes."

However, Choi Lee-kyung was far from being upset; he nodded tamely and followed Kim sangyoon's words, taking a few steps closer to him. I had

no idea if the Necromancer was a fool or if he truly believed Sangyoon's words, but this scene was incredibly frustrating.

"What pretense, does he think he's strong?" I murmured, revealing my distaste for the Warrior with little emotion. Even though the others were not able to hear me, Choi Lee-kyung became restless, wary of my sarcastic remarks.

His rigid, blinking face seemed to be asking for no more trouble, but I ignored him and asked about this and that. Besides, I was incredibly curious. Why on earth would he come to the [Tower of Command]? There must be a dungeon that matches Choi Lee-kyung's level that would be more fitting…

So, I sent a message to Choi Lee-kyung using the system's chatting service. He struggled with this simple function, so I teased him a little–how amusing. Perhaps he became frustrated with me, however, he sent a sharp answer as if his temper had finally risen.

[Choi Lee-kyung: Wow~ You're so smart^6]

[Seo Dawon: kekekekekekekeke]

I quickly adapted, steadily answering my own questions.

[Choi Lee-kyung: I needed to strengthen Lackey T_T]

[Seo Dawon: Lackey? What's that?]

[Choi Lee-kyung: My first servant]

[Seo Dawon: First?? You have another servant besides me?]

[Choi Lee-kyung: Mhmm, you're the second.]

Listening further to his story, I learned that Choi Lee-kyung entered the dungeon after paying a large sum–2 million won–to retrieve an evolution material for his servant.

I was nervous for a moment, worried that Choi Lee-kyung had previously signed another servant, but I realized that Lackey must be a low-class summon he received after choosing his class. After all, Lackey wasn't particularly a human name…I'm sure Choi Lee-kyung was the one to name it.

"What…I wasn't your first?"

Though I released a somewhat dissatisfied noise, I continued the conversation because there were still many things to find about Choi Lee-kyung. It was a good atmosphere to ask these trivial questions.

Choi Lee-kyung seemed to be flustered by the stream of constant questions, but he answered most of them sincerely without avoiding them.

Rather than being wary of my questions, bombarding him ceaselessly, he seemed to have taken it as a sign of friendship. He, who was embarrassed by the occasional question but still answered with little reminders and pushes, seemed to be someone who must have been lonely for a long time.

[Seo Dawon: What about a girlfriend?]

[Choi Lee-kyung: I had one, but got dumped.]

That was a lie……

Choi Lee-kyung must have no idea what kind of expression he makes when he lies: an anxious gaze and shuddered shoulders, chewed lips as if he had been scolded. He continued to talk about his girlfriend–a story that not even a dog would believe.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Imagine if your master's blood was 'pornographic' to you. Jeez, this system is cruel to both Dawon and MC.

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[**Seo Dawon:** Why’d you get dumped lololol]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Because I started living in the Hub]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** We couldn’t meet often]

[**Seo Dawon:** *whistle noise* She wasn’t a User?]

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** Mhmm, We got together before I was a User. When I got here, she left me.]

Why was he even pretending to have dated a woman? I had many questions that would make his life difficult right now, but I stopped asking for a moment and turned towards Choi Lee-kyung.

If I drove him into a corner, he would most likely be incredibly embarrassed, right? He may not open his mouth for a long while…But, didn’t these impulsive lies reveal one’s weaknesses or inferiority complexes? I wanted to know why Choi Lee-kyung felt the need to pretend he had dated a girl previously.

[**Choi Lee-kyung**: And you?]

[**Seo Dawon**: ?]

[**Choi Lee-kyung**: Did you have a girlfriend?]

[**Seo Dawon**: keke]

[**Seo Dawon**: Look at my face]

[**Seo Dawon**: Do you really think they would have left me alone?]

[**Choi Lee-kyung**: lol]

I pretended to be ignorant as to Choi Lee-kyung's true question and observed him carefully.

The necromancer held both a relieved and slightly disappointed expression–a complex look. When we locked gazes, I said, jokingly, "I was popular with men too…" Choi Lee-kyung's face flushed red. Seeing his face, I suddenly guessed why he insisted on such a foolhardy lie.

'Maybe, he doesn't want to be outed as gay?'

[**Choi Lee-kyung:** I doubt that, heh]

'Again, he's hiding that he's interested in me..?'

With such a shallow front as well.

I snorted involuntarily. However, it wasn't bad for me for him to hide his interest. If he were to openly show his attraction, it was like I could refuse him. So, I pretended to not realize anything and looked away from him, choosing not to continue this line of conversation.

[You've exited the Tower of Command Hard Route.]

[You've entered a 'normal mode' trap room.]

Meanwhile our party walked straight out of the danger zone. I thought, now we could finally escape the [Tower of Command], but suddenly the red-head walking up front called out to Choi Lee-kyung with an ear-piercing voice, "Choi Lee-kyung, what's the name of the material you need?"

"Ah, that's… 'Contaminated Dark Liquid.' It drops when you kill a mourning slime…"

"And those appear in trap rooms, correct?"

The monster that would drop Choi Lee-kyung's desired evolution material would soon appear. That monster, the [Mourning Slime], was yellow–exactly as if someone had urinated on some half-melted jelly– and produced an unpleasant smell.

Of course, as I had attempted to raid this dungeon before, this was a familiar monster. In particular, while trying to find the entrance to the hard mode route, we encountered the oily trail left behind by the slimes. While trying to find a shortcut, Bae Jaemin had disturbed a pipe that was chock full of [Mourning Slimes], and we wasted 30 minutes.

'Now that I think about it, that must have been done on purpose, right? He planned to kill us; he couldn't have touched things meaninglessly…'

While contemplating, my eyes suddenly landed on Choi Lee-kyung, who was frowning and blocking his nose next to me.

In fact, ingredient or not, I had no desire to get closer because of the risk factor, but I didn't think this encounter would pose a big threat to a party of this level. So, I decided to observe for now…As expected, that alone was

not reassuring. So, I quietly applied defensive skills such as [cure], [high-refresh], and [anti-poison]. Slimes are usually highly toxic, one may be caught up in the poison trails or injured due to splashing acid; all three skills were defensive magic specialized for those situations.

Of course, Choi Lee-kyung did not seem to realize that he was being protected; there were a lot of moving parts to keep an eye on, after all.

Kim Sangyoon shouted in frustration at Choi Lee-kyung, who appeared to be standing blankly without taking any countermeasures, “Hey, you don’t have a mask?”

“Huh, yeah…”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“Ngh……”

“Quickly use that, you fool.” The warrior handed over one workshop-made mask. Seeing how his eyes watered, he seemed to be saddened over just one mask, but he had no choice. If the person that paid to be carried were to die, he would be ruined.

However, the way Choi Lee-kyung looked at, moved, the red-haired man just from a reluctantly given mask annoyed me; he had no wits. I wanted to retort, ‘if you want to thank someone, turn my way,’ but that felt childish. Instead, I just stood back and watched the party hunt. It was as awful as I had expected; they had no fundamentals, and their positions were all messed up…

“Attack!” The red hair, who was at least better than a dog, ran around on his own, but…that was all. Further, I was more annoyed at the sight of him fighting. That warrior who would ignore Choi Lee-kyung despite merely being at that low level, and Choi Lee-kyung who was far too foolish to be angry at those who ignored him.

Still, they’d prove to be examples of what not to do. [1] I tried to point out their mistakes one by one and conveyed basic knowledge of dungeoneering

and raiding to Choi Lee-kyung. Fortunately, Choi Lee-kyung was quite perceptive in this matter and quickly understood what I was trying to point out.

However, in the midst of listening carefully, Choi Lee-kyung released a deep sigh while looking at the red-haired man. “I’m jealous…”

“Of what?”

“I wish I had that kind of item…” He looked at the red hair’s back with eyes full of longing and desire.

“Are you serious?”

“……”

It’s just, what’s there to admire about him… Above all that, how could you envy that red hair with me in front of you?

My temper flared and I became emotional, but I tried to understand–Choi Leekyung was a newbie who lived without knowing any better. For someone at his level, considering all that he had seen and could predict, I suppose that red hair could attract his eyes.

“When we leave, let’s pick out a combat uniform first. Before we can find something suitable from a Dungeon, we can buy something basic, ready-to-wear at the DAA or something…” I said.

“DAA? Are you talking about the workshop, DAA?”

“Yeah. That still exists, right?”

So, setting aside the bitterness I felt, I mentioned the combat uniform brand DAA. After all, DAA was the most recognized luxury equipment brand to general Users.

As expected, Choi Lee-kyung opened his eyes impossibly wide. His reaction was a bit cheesy: opening his mouth and closing it a few times. But

soon he said, “I’ll wear it if you buy it for me,”–how cute. Are you intimidated, Choi Lee-kyung?

Ignoring his doubtful attitude, I continued, “Also buy yourself some accessories. You look broke right now.”

Eventually, Choi Lee-kyung said, straightforwardly, “Hey, I don’t have any money.”

Did he really think I’d let him pay for everything? Those words travelled up my throat, but I was struck by the desire to tease him; I closed my mouth.

Choi Lee-kyung couldn’t see the mirth in my eyes and, as if he were suffering, said while stammering, “What you’re saying is impossible with my bank account right now…,” trying to stop me. I looked sideways at him, and checked my unlocked inventory.

[Dragon Heart]

[Makya ^{2} made on January 7th]

[Lord of the Shadow Palace’s Coins]

[Frame – Ruagh’s Split Pendant (Left)]

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[Icart Nightmare]

[Heaven or Hell]

Just by selling the things within my material items category, we could buy a few buildings straight away. Moreover, much of my equipment were artifacts of high quality and returned back to my inventory after falling off my body. Except for my staff, all the equipment I had used during my lifetime were stored.

Selling just one of these would solve his money problems for the rest of his life, and yet, even after signing with me, Choi Lee-kyung was panting after equipment worth only in the hundreds of million won. He coveted a sword that only held a single skill.

But, before I could explain, Red Hair called Choi Lee-kyung over, cutting our conversation short ambiguously.

He urged the Necromancer to hurry up and take the ingredient that had appeared; there was no problem so far. However, as soon as Choi Lee-kyung safely held the item, Red Hair suddenly dragged him into his embrace. How ridiculous. Astonishingly, the person who shouted, ‘Why are you touching my head,’ so tetchily when I stroked his hair returned the red head’s hug with an uncertain smile.

“Hey, write a good review for us, okay?”

All the while listening to a bully like Kim Sangyoon…

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Thanks to Remiss for the Kofi <3 <3

Not @ Seo Dawon saying how he’s glad MC is hiding he’s attracted to him but also calling him cute all the time + getting angry that MC is idolising Kim Sangyoon.

Footnotes

1. = something or someone that gives enlightenment by showcasing negative aspects.
2. a famous sword made by a Chinese blacksmith. As the story goes, the sword was named after his wife who threw herself into the furnace in order to finish forging this sword.

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That eye-catching scene was, however, brief.

[‘Normal Mode’ boss monster Lich Lord (Normal) has been killed by ‘Ahn Juseong’ and 63 others!]

[‘Hard Mode’ boss monster Lich Lord (Hard) has been killed by ‘Bae Jaemin’ and 33 others (all from a single party)!]

While we were still meandering in the trap room, a notification regarding the parties that entered and defeated the boss monster appeared. Red hair suddenly began to blow his top.

“Ahn Joosung? Ahn Joosung, that bastard, was supposed to inform me before he defeated the boss!”

It seems he’s been scammed? Of course, it was worth seeing Kim Sangyoon’s face turn as red as his hair, but Bae Jaemin’s name in the notification–the news of him defeating the hard mode boss–was more important than the news regarding Ahn Joosung. There was no chance of it being someone with the same name as Bae Jaemin; after all, just a few hours ago, I had come face to face with his living self.

There’s no way to figure out why, right away, he’s wearing an eyepatch, but it was still rather annoying to see him alive even after losing one eyeball. When the body is permanently damaged, Users would normally retire from dungeoneering–unless they’re short of money, that is. You could not perform as well as before the injury.

‘But to be in charge of a raiding party at the [Tower of Command]…that means his skills must have significantly improved from before…’

I felt I had no chance of winning if I suddenly attacked, especially now that I’ve revived as a servant. I had access to a few small tricks now, but less than a tenth of my full power could be used in this state. Could I take on the current Bae Jaemin as I am now? I wasn’t sure.

And, even if I succeeded in killing Bae Jaemin, Choi Lee-kyung may be the one to pay for my actions. He and I are different; I’m already dead. If I were to hastily engage Bae Jaemin and Choi Lee-kyung were to be imprisoned or murdered, my last chance would disappear.

“I think it’s over…Why don’t we get out of here, for now?” said a bard in Kim Sangyoon’s crew.

“……Let’s leave.”

Meanwhile, the situation seemed to have settled. Kim Sangyoon was in a dirty mood, but he pressed the exit button as there was nothing else he could do.

It’s been such a long time since I’ve felt this sensation. “We’re finally getting out of this place.”

Choi Lee-kyung looked at me for a moment when he heard my mumbles but soon closed his eyes at the prickling bright light. I continued to stare at him until the light swallowed his face completely. Soon, the light disappeared and the space was occupied by new surroundings.

* * *

The hub, which I had not returned to in three years, seemed to not have changed. Of course, compared to the basement-like [Tower of Command], with its dark backgrounds and musty scent, the place felt like heaven.

“Seo Dawon,” Choi Lee-kyung said.

“Huh?”

“If you don’t mind, I want to go home and rest…Is there anything you need to do?”

“No, Let’s go.”

Choi Lee-kyung began to side-eye me from that point on.

Was it because we kept hearing Bae Jaemin’s voice all around? Whenever we heard mentions of the Priest, he kept on flinching and glancing at me; no matter how you see it, he must be worried that hearing Bae Jaemin’s name would plummet my mood…

“Bae Jaemin is going to have a press conference…Do you want to see it?” As if he were confirming my guesses, Choi Lee-kyung, despite sporting an exhaustion-laden face, kept walking on eggshells around me.

Well, I was indeed curious as to why he would be holding a press conference, but if I were to see Bae Jaemin now, my mood would turn dirty. I had no way to touch him at the moment, and observing him uselessly wasn’t to my taste.

“It’s fine.” I answered.

However, even after I said it was fine, Choi Leekyung continued to sigh quietly and gave me secret glances. He was most likely trying to guess at my feelings, but his poor observation skill was quite amusing.

I was forced to open my mouth, believing that he'd continue to be nervous all the way to his accommodation if I didn't reassure him. "Why do you look more depressed than me–the literal dead corpse?"

"…I'm just tired. Enough about me; are you okay?"

There's no way I could be okay. However, if I said that, Choi Lee-kyung would probably be in tears all day. So, I relaxed and pretended to be cheerful. "It's been a while since I came to the Hub. It's gotten a lot better since I went into the <Tower of Command>. The air is refreshing."

Come to think of it, the weather was truly refreshingly cool and sunny. Perhaps because the sun was still high in the sky, walking along the shining white tile path next to a well-scaped park made the memories of being locked up in a dungeon feel like a dream. It felt like I was back to my daily life.

However, now I had to go to Choi Lee-kyung's home–who knows where that was–and the luxury housing complex, where I had originally lived, was the opposite way. Thinking of my original home naturally led to memories of my family. My previous home was probably sold by my family?

Recalling my family's faces one by one, I didn't feel sorrowful nor wistful. This empty feeling… We never had a close relationship, but still, it's not as if I lived separated from familial ties. Was this another side effect of becoming a servant?

I didn't feel it was necessary to tell Choi Lee-kyung about these feelings though. Somehow, I knew that if I shared this information, Choi Lee-kyung would shed the tears that could no longer leak from my eyes. Afterwards, I spoke some reassuring words to Choi Lee-kyung, and the Necromancer, tired, eventually walked quietly, looking down at the ground.

After walking like that for quite a while, Choi Lee-kyung, who walked half a step ahead of me, stopped in his tracks.

"Here it is…."

The blue front gate left a strong impression on me.

‘He lives in a more charmingly cozy place than I had thought…’

To put things nicely, the home felt vintage. It was a bit funny that the front gate’s handle was shaped like a duck.

“Do you live alone?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

Choi Lee-kyung nodded, confirming my guess, and went inside first. After passing the gate, I could see a small front yard and porch. Further in, I saw a grand window connected directly to the living room.

Usually, the homeowner can choose their desired design when first choosing their home; Choi Lee-kyung seems to have wanted a warm home with a good amount of lighting. Most of the mansions I owned were large or medium-sized; more often than not, the interior decoration was modern. I had hated vintage-style the most, but…

‘…It’s not bad.’

Of course, having a living room exposed directly to the outside world was not good for safety–sometime in the future, I’ll have to take that into my own hands.

I looked around carefully, checking for other presences–you never know, before entering alongside the Necromancer. He welcomed me awkwardly with a flushed face.

I looked around the living room, feeling Choi Lee-kyung’s prickling gaze on my back. After seeing the eclectic sofa and TV set, I recalled Bae Jaemin’s press conference and took a seat. “Can I turn on the TV?”

“Huh? Yeah!”

While watching the traitor’s press conference, my eyes trained onto whatever was dangling on his wrist; I looked carefully.

Of course, judging from the location of the last [Vengeful Ghost Essence] I had cerebrally known that Bae Jaemin must have killed Jung Garam, but… I didn't expect for him to proudly display [Beatrice's Prayer], something the young Assassin had worn.

–It's HaHae.

In addition, I was very familiar with the guild that Bae Jaemin had supposedly newly created. It was a long time ago, but I was recruited by this suspicious group that hid their guild master's identity.

The name of the organization, at the time, was 'HaHae.' Given the situation, it wasn't a coincidence that those two names overlapped. And, if this group went public with that name, unlike before…

'It means that after killing us, they must have obtained the territory we occupied.'

After thinking that, I turned off the TV and told Choi Lee-kyung my thoughts. In addition, I briefly shared my plans for the near future.

Firstly, we needed to concentrate on Choi Lee-kyung's stats. More than anything else, he was in imminent need of 'level ups.' Even if we were to try and find good equipment to fit his needs, equipment level restrictions existed; if I were to try and teach him useful skills, his stats were too low. It'd be too burdensome to meet the minimum needed to utilize the skills now. One cannot use one-of-a-kind skills that exist nowhere else in the world if they lack mana. [1]

'I had originally wanted to revive Olim-ie or Kyungsik-ie next, but…'

Those two were party members who matched well with me, but they would not be of much help in making Choi Lee-kyung stronger. I remembered Jung Garam, who succeeded in leveling up at an incredible

speed, and decided to use his knowledge to grow Choi Lee-kyung so that the Necromancer will not die from just one hit.

Footnotes

1. I think most would know what mana is, but it’s Magical power needed to cast spells. Think of it as your repository for spell use.

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And, growing fast requires not only insider knowledge but money to support the growth as well.

In particular, for casters like Choi Lee-kyung, wealth translated into skills. Equipment, accessories, summon ingredients, mana stones…there was really no end to greed when it comes to casters. Among them, the price for equipment was unusually high as the equipment a caster could wear was limited.

The state of Choi Lee-kyung's fortune was obvious even without asking, so I opened my inventory to see if there was anything worth selling. At first, I had thought all of them would bring in loads of money, but, in reality, there weren't many items that could be cashed in immediately.

In particular, the most expensive items, my equipment, would create rumors immediately when sold. Perceptive eyes (especially rankers) will notice that Seo Dawon had once been known to wear those.

If that happens, rather than worrying about making sales, Choi Lee-kyung could be kidnapped. Plus, it would be better to transfer those to Choi Lee-kyung rather than selling them. The equipment restriction level, though, for these items are quite high.

'For Lee-kyung-ie to wear these…he may be able to wear one earring by next year?'

I became gloomy at the fact that there was still such a gap in levels, even considering a fast level-up plan; I swallowed a sigh and moved on to the next inventory category.

‘How much will reagents go for?’

Most of the reagents I now owned second-hand were made by Kyungsik-ie for experimenting purposes. Most of them were ‘doping’ type items that raised one’s abilities above one’s limits for a set period of time. Since the ingredients used to make the reagents were rare items such as [Kirin’s Bones] or [Asabi’s tears], the reagent itself was extraordinary. The problem was, most of these reagents contained [Choi Kyungsik]’s name in the manufacturer section.

‘Reagents made by Choi Kyungsik will definitely garner some aggro. We may have to explain how we’ve sourced them…’

Of course, not all of his reagents contained his name. But the, the issue there was… the names were all like this:

[Love Night that makes you ♥hot when you apply it]

[Tired until the morning >_< Long Night]

[An unconventional event for a special day! ‘Half Cat Mode’ transformation reagent (10 hours)]

[Sexual pleasure UP the moment it’s eaten! Sexy Candy]

[Monster mode ON! Upgrade your weapon (whirling)] [1]

Even though I said I didn’t need them, Choi Kyungsik giggled and pushed a whole set into my hands…With the Alchemist’s skills, they would not have been haphazardly made–and there was bound to be a demand for them. However, imagining Choi Lee-kyung with his wide-open round eyes

asking ‘What’s a Cat mode?’… My hand naturally moved onto the next category. Money is good and all, but, at this point, there was no need to resort to something so easily misunderstood.

Then, something finally caught my eye: a [Barnasium]–a material that could upgrade a top-grade item to the next level. I had collected them long ago to upgrade my accessories, but the deceased have no need for equipment… I had no lingering attachment to these gems.

I searched through [Market Raid] with Choi Lee-kyung’s ID to find out the going market price.

He hesitated when he saw my actions, “I-I don’t have any money…..”

“Yeah, it looks like you don’t.”

Is he perhaps worried that I’d mooch off of him? If Jung Garam saw this house, he would whine and make a fuss, saying how claustrophobic he felt… It was a bit laughable to see someone living in this sort of place worry that I’ll scam them.

Of course, I never voiced those thoughts. But, my silence must have conveyed a similar nuance; Choi Lee-kyung soon clamped his lips shut. I searched for the market price of the [Barnasiums].

[Mid-grade Barnasiums are selling for 180 million won.]

Fortunately, the item was still in use. Perhaps because the <Tower of Command> had only just opened for raid today and the new top items had yet to enter the marketplace, the Barnasiums had successfully defended their stable price. Still, regretfully, it was still worth half as much as it did when I was alive.

“Ah, the market value dropped drastically….” It was harder to secure cash than I had expected.

However, when I started writing the sales post to sell the [Barnasiums], a notification popped up on the app, asking if I'd like to check on Choi Lee-kyung's posted sales. I had pressed confirmation, wondering if he had at least something worth selling. He didn't fail my expectations, though, and had uploaded a large number of funny things. [Orc's crude fan]…who would even buy that kind of thing?

"Does anyone buy things like this?" I asked.

"No, wait! What did you just do?"

"What?"

"Barnasium or whatever! Did you just post something for sale?"

"Uhuh."

"You–do you have it?" Choi Lee-kyung asked a strange question. I mean, I'm not some swindler in a peaceful country. [2] Why would I sell something I don't have?

"I posted it because I have it." After answering bluntly, I took the [Barnasium stone] out of my inventory with the intent to show it off. As soon as I put down the round, marble-shaped jewels, they rolled towards Choi Lee-kyung, scratching the wooden table along the way. Choi Lee-kyung grabbed them reflexively. Perhaps he was surprised; his fingers were trembling.

'His expression is really honest.'

He was quite fast at mental calculations; he seemed to realize that he was holding more than 10 billion won in his hands. A minute after holding the [Barnasiums], the [Market Raid] app began to explode with transaction alerts.

"Hey, tell me your account number," I said.

Looking like a stiff breeze would knock him unconscious, Choi Lee-kyung called out his bank number. And, less than half a day later, all the [Barnasiums] were sold and cashed in.

Looking at Choi Lee-kyung, who looked astonished at the flood of deposit notifications from his cell phone, I was reminded of a secret account I had saved for one purpose or another in the past. Wouldn't it be tempting to broach the secret fund–the necromancer was more sensitive to money than I had imagined. Later when Jung Garam was called in later, we will need continued cooperation; perhaps this would be the perfect carrot to dangle in front of him.

"Money that I can 'swallow'….T-then, do you mean to give me all of it?"

"I'm dead anyway; souls have no need of material goods. The same goes for the rest of my rascals at the guild."

"But…."

"Don't you think you should be paid for your part in the revenge?"

Choi Lee-kyung's eyes grew wider as soon as I brought up the secret funds; he was eventually convinced by my promise to revise the contract clauses. Humans were passive unless they were directly connected to the cause; Choi Lee-kyung involvement in this revenge was forced. No matter the cost, it was worth it to kindle the Necromancer's enthusiasm.

'I don't need it anyway.'

Of course, if the scenario succeeds and I'm resurrected, I'll need money again. If I'm truly able to return to how I was before, though, money will not be a large issue. That much I could earn again.

* * *

As soon as evening fell, Choi Lee-kyung released a deep yawn, almost as if he were sleeping while standing. Since we sold the [Barnasiums] as soon as we exited the dungeon, I realized that his energy was all used up, but…

‘It’s not even 10 pm now…’

Do those of his level usually have such lagging stamina? Or, is Choi Lee-kyung particularly weak? Ignorant of my misgivings, the Necromancers went to the bathroom to wash up and said he needed to sleep. I realized that there was another special characteristic to being a servant after Choi Lee-kyung entered the bathroom.

[Ugh…… I’m super tired……]

Choi Lee-kyung’s voice–despite the fact that he entered another room to wash himself–could suddenly be heard very clearly. I jumped up, shocked, while laying on his bed. However, the bathroom door was firmly closed, and Choi Lee-kyung’s presence could be clearly felt beyond the closed door.

‘What is it now….’

What is this perverted skill?

It was absurd and strangely unpleasant. I had looked for a way to adjust the volume of the skill, but there was nothing.

I had a skill to temporarily block all of my senses. When I used it, though, it felt even more strange; while other senses were blocked, I could only hear Choi Lee-kyung’s voice. Every echo in the bathroom clung to my ears, and I felt like I was showering with him.

[Haah….Haaaaah….]

Of course, Choi Lee-kyung had no idea. He could release such audible, long sighs because he had no idea. I used the [meditation] skill I often used when my mind felt like it was in a disarray when I touched my ears in a

habitual nervous tic. Then, the goosebumps crawling up and down my spine began to calm down. When my frustration with the skill's effect began to clear, I could analyze this situation.

'The larger the distance, am I more focused on Choi Lee-kyung's voice? Since there's no volume control, it must be an inherent characteristic of servants…'

However, does it have to be like this? I thought whether or not to tell Choi Lee-kyung about this characteristic or to keep my mouth shut, but, soon afterwards, Choi Lee-kyung let out a strange [Nnngh….] sound. All my thoughts flew away in the wind.

'No way, in the bathroom…?'

Several imagined scenes crossed my mind, but fortunately Choi Lee-kyung did not commit a faux pas. However, perhaps he enjoyed his time, he took a long time to shower. The effect of the special characteristic was cut off only when the Necromancer left the bathroom and we locked gazes.

TL: Thank you so much Nikki for the Ko-fi.

Not gonna lie, I'm kinda excited to revive Kyung-sik. I wanna know why he made those things.

Footnotes

1. This is, of course, refering to the…lower weapon.
2. This is a meme referencing a second-hand selling site similar to Craigslist in the English speaking sphere of the internet–it was quite infamous for scams. There was even a joke mobile game that alluded to its scammy nature: second-hand peaceful country.

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Chapter 135

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‘The connection is disrupted when I’m looking at Choi Lee-kyung.’

It was likely enforcing the importance of confirming the summoner’s physical condition with your eyes. Furthermore, Choi Lee-kyung clearly knew nothing of this characteristic; he did not seem like the type to be able to shower calmly if he knew.

After confirming once again Choi Lee-kyung’s ignorance, I chose to keep the information to myself for now. In a way, this could function as a wire-tapping device.

‘Just in case…’

I hoped otherwise, but this effect would become an important guide if Choi Lee-kyung tried to start some nonsense. So, feigning innocence, I conversed with Choi Lee-kyung as if nothing had happened and waited for him to fall asleep.

* * *

After confirming that Choi Lee-kyung had fallen completely asleep, I sat at the table and mentally organized all that had happened today. And, I

began to set priorities for the actions that should come first. Most importantly, I should secure information that I currently direly lack.

That is: securing accurate information on Necromancers.

‘What kind of battle style do Necromancers adopt?’

So, I first searched for items related to the class. The lack of Necromancer User population was an issue, though, and the amount of reference material available was not large–perhaps because of the class’s infamy as a ruinous class. In particular, video information was especially rare.

[Bone Shard! Scratch Attack!]

[Kyaaaa!]

Only after I managed to find a mob hunting video did I understand why a Necromancer’s servants were given such eavesdropping characteristics.

‘Servants don’t fight autonomously. It will attack when approached, but it remains passive without specific instruction.’

In short, a servant’s use was extremely limited beyond organizing its movements a step at a time–with the servant reciting those specific movements. Of course, I would act similarly to other human beings with their own ego, but I held a special contract that allowed for exceptional results. The Necromancer’s basic summons had simple attack patterns and were quite lethargic outside of their set responses.

‘Is that why this characteristic manifested?’

In invoking a Necromancer’s skill, specific instructions for their servants were important. In other words, the instructions that came from their mouths were a bit like computer ‘programming.’ So, no matter what

condition the owner may be in, he must be able to speak to utilize the servant. The system provided a functionality where a servant in any situation could hear any word that came out of his master's mouth.

'Then, the cleanest way to block an enemy Necromancer would be to gag him or cut off his tongue?'

I hoped otherwise, but I needed to think of the most efficient way to prepare for Choi Lee-kyung's possible confrontation with me down the line. After much consideration, I gave up on cutting off his tongue.

'I'll go crazy from the scent of blood.'

Then, I'll just have to gag him.

However, even with the master gagged, the servant may move in different ways. How would a servant react when their Necromancer was in a situation where he was rendered mute…? I was curious, but, no matter how I searched the hunter information site, the data simply wasn't available.

Other classes would be overflowing with information, recommended equipment by level for example; I was flustered–it was the first time I had no information on a target. The same was true of paid information sites that I had used often when I was still alive. Since the population of users were so small, there was no significant benefit in paying to access English or Chinese information accounts either.

'Has Choi Lee-kyung become a pioneer among necromancers?'

Rather, the information we had uncovered would be a huge bounty for these sites.

For a Necromancer to be able to revive a fallen User by signing a [Vengeful Ghost Contract] with someone who died with many regrets in a dungeon… If I heard this while alive, I would have snorted, saying how absurd that was. That was how tremendous and unrealistic that power was. So, the moment this fact became widely known…

‘There will be an enormous reaction…’

So, I quickly threw away any lingering desires to find more information on Necromancers; there was no place left to squeeze out such details.

“Nnghh……”

At that time, I saw Choi Lee-kyung tossing and turning. I moved to close the laptop. I was going to close it, but…

[Berserker ‘Kim Sangyoon’ is starting a live broadcast.]

With a twinkle, Choi Lee-kyung’s laptop and cellphone were notified at the same time.

“This is Sangyoon…Hah…Urgh…Fuck……”

Because of that, I watched Kim Sangyoon’s drunk and incoherent self on his live broadcast. In trying to reveal the shocking failure of the raid to his subscribers, he streamed with only a simple black background with no accessories other than the microphone; he spat muddled swear words with a stumbling tongue.

[Sangyoon-ie hyung, you’re really drunk…]

[Someone should turn off hyung’s stream…]

[Hyung, get some sleep first TT_TT]

The broadcast was truly not worth watching; it was enough that the fans (though I really didn’t understand why they were fans) who were watching

with me sent messages laden with concern.

A slurred swear against someone accompanied by quiet whimperings; cheapskate-like mutterings about borrowed money. After listening to 20 minutes of this trashy broadcast, I skimmed through his other streams on Berserker's channel.

But…setting aside subscribing to Kim Sangyoon's channel and enabling notification settings…there was not one video that Choi Lee-kyung hadn't [liked] in this channel of more than 100 videos. Wouldn't that make him an avid fan? Furthermore, Choi Lee-kyung's Youtube username was his real name, and I could see each comment he had persistently left underneath every video.

[**Lee-kyung:** Where did you get the pink pants you wore in the opening? I'll skip on that lolol]

[**Lee-kyung:** 00:17 I snorted while drinking cola lolol]

[**Lee-kyung:** This hyung always smiles so wide whenever a girl comes along kekekeke] [1]

[**Lee-kyung:** lolol Ah, he's feeling extra good today] [2]

Was Kim Sangyoon that fun to watch? I read Choi Lee-kyung's overly excited comments; my tense jaw wouldn't relax.

What was more surprising was how he didn't show how much he liked the streamer and didn't show any of that fan-behavior in the <Tower of Command>. Even when asked, he only told me that Kim Sangyoon was carrying him and spoke nothing of this youtube channel…

Come to think of it, maybe this was why he blushed when Kim Sangyoon embraced him. I stared at the sleeping Choi Lee-kyung, strangely

discomfited.

So, I stole a look at Choi Lee-kyung's other social media after the Youtube channel–his accounts were automatically logged in. DMs [3] or whatever, looking through the list, there was nothing in particular that stood out. Therefore, Kim Sangyoon's presence was all the more noticeable. Even more annoyingly, Choi Lee-kyung was enough of a fan to follow Kim Sangyoon's personal social media accounts.

I approached Choi Lee-kyung, who was still asleep, and stared blatantly at his face. For some reason I wanted to pinch him on the nose but restrained myself. Instead, I picked him off the ground and laid him on the bed. When I picked him up, his eyebrows crumpled, as if he were about to wake up; however, after I covered him with a blanket, he simply smacked his lips silently and turned his head towards my direction. His mouth was left slightly open as well…

And, when I suddenly had the cruel urge to shove something into that round gap…

[Clack Clack Clack!]

Out of the blue, white bones manifested atop Choi Lee-kyung's body.

I did not reflexively touch it; the mass was the same shape as the entry-level skeleton I had seen in the Necromancer video I watched earlier. As soon as I saw it, I realized, 'Ah, that must be Lackey.'

"Lackey?" I asked.

As soon as I spoke, the skeleton looked my way but didn't approach. We both were sizing each other up.

Red glittering eyes could be seen through the emptiness of his eye sockets, and the purple core inside the ribs began to glow strangely. I wondered if I had something similar inside the shell I was inhabiting…

When…

[Clack!]

Lackey lowered its body and rushed at me without warning.

Of course, I didn't avoid it. Its physical attack had little effect when I was simply a floating soul. As expected, its teeth latched onto empty space. Unfortunately, the skeleton constantly rushed at me without any semblance of intelligence to distinguish the futility–like a dog protecting its owner.

"Serving without any form of ego… Will I become like that?"

TL: I'd be…so embarrassed if someone I liked read through all my fangirl-like comments to someone. Or the comments I make on the novels I read >///<

Next update will be a double update and the last of this flashback. Turns out, Seo Dawon has no idea what's going on with Necromancers–No one does!!

Footnotes

1. The original says, "showing molars," aka: smiling so wide you see the molars.
2. = a composite word of for real and for tension. A word used to mean that he's excited genuinely and not forced for broadcast.
3. Direct messages/private messages

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Chapter 136

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TW: self harm

The skeleton remained within a certain distance while rushing at me. When I ignored the skeleton–thinking that was all it could do–and reached out a hand towards Choi Lee-kyung…

Crack–!

A strange light suddenly appeared from within the skeleton's skull, different from before. The unique glow of a skill enveloped its teeth and jaw. Interested, I didn't avoid it and stayed still. Soon, the skeleton's hard teeth succeeded in biting through my hand.

'Maybe because I'm an undead…my pain receptors have dulled.'

I checked my half-torn knuckles. After eyeing me, the skeleton put more force on its jaws, as if it were trying to completely bite them off.

I'd had enough, so I grabbed the skeleton's skull with the unbitten hand and hurled it into the corner of the room. Since I tossed it lightly, the skeleton was able to quickly stand up again, but it couldn't avoid the chains that sprung forth from the floor. In the midst of rushing towards me, its limbs were tied up.

[Clack – clack – clack]

The clacking sound was annoying, so the chains wrapped around its mouth like a gag. Somehow, the ensuing gnawing sound was more agitating to my ears.

I checked the recovering condition of my bitten fingers that were fluttering in the air. My mood wasn't soured since I had uncovered quite a lot of information.

'So it's possible for servants under the same master to attack each other; if injured, I can barely feel the pain… However, since I had yet to be exposed to holy attacks, I could hardly be confident about the lack of pain…'

It took almost a minute for the bitten finger to recover. Still glancing sideways at the struggling skeleton, I retrieved an appropriate item from my inventory.

[Martyr's Sword]

The retrieved weapon was a long sword often used as a secondary weapon by Paladins that benefited from an additional effect that dealt extra damage to the undead.

This perfect item suddenly crossed my mind, and I gripped it in my hands without delay. I approached the skeleton and took a swing, but, just before the tip cleaved the skeleton's skull in two, I stopped.

"……"

I turned back to look at Choi Lee-kyung–he was still in deep, turbulent sleep. He wouldn't wake up, no matter what happened.

However, I sheathed the sword; I also released the skeleton from my binding skills. Even though it was free from my chains, the skeleton didn't move–it knew that it had been suppressed thoroughly.

Kick–!

I kicked the skeleton towards the bed. Only then, trembling, did it crawl under Choi Lee-kyung's mattress.

Crouching in that position, it raised its head towards me; two red, unblinking dots were glaring at me from under the bed. It was a gaze I had seen many times while still alive–I understood its meaning immediately.

"So, you have an ego too, huh?"

[……]

It was a hateful gaze, full of desire to kill.

However, wasn't it just an entry-level summon given when the class was first chosen? The servant in the other Necromancer's video didn't give me a similar feeling… How did this difference come about? It was quite suspicious, but I stopped paying attention as there was no way to arrive at the correct answer right this moment.

Lifting the [Martyr's Sword] in one hand, I immediately cut off the ring finger of my other hand.

"Haah…"

It hurt much more than I expected. When the skeleton bit and tore through my finger, I was only annoyed–I felt something akin to cutting my fingernail too short. However, I felt the pain of fire running burning down my hands when I cut myself with the [Martyr's Sword]. As I had thought, holy attribute attacks or weapons that had been optionally upgraded with holy attribute damage were deadly to the evil properties of us servants.

Black smoke, instead of red blood, poured out from the dismembered finger. After a certain period of time, the smoke faded and the cut fingers slowly grew back. It took about five minutes to return to its original state–five times longer than the skeleton's bite.

By the time my fingers had all recovered, I had thrown the [Martyr's Sword] back into my inventory and approached Choi Lee-kyung's bed. The

bloodlust originating from underneath the bed had increased, but I ignored that and pushed at Choi Lee-kyung. He lightly pushed back. I sat on the vacant space that was created by my gentle shoves.

‘Of all things, Bae Jaemin is a priest, so he’ll be an incompatible opponent. Kim Olim is… Can she still access her divine power when she revives?’

While mired in such thoughts, Choi Lee-kyung’s arm touched my body while he tossed and turned. I looked at him slowly.

“……”

Then, I looked at his round head.

Actually, a little while ago, while pointing at the skeleton’s shiny skull with the [Martyr’s Sword], I was briefly overcome by a ridiculous impulse.

[If I cleave his head, won’t that fill the room with a pleasant smell……]

A terrible impulse to want to split Choi Lee-kyung’s skull rather than his servant’s.

Thankfully, I still had some rationality, so I cut off my own finger before doing anything I’d regret; the pain wiped my mind clean. After my hand healed and I could calm down once more, I felt relieved. Irritation began to arrive in waves. There was no doubt; this was a ruse perpetuated by the system. In the first place, I had never been a psycho that found pleasure in killing another.

What was more frustrating was that this desire wasn’t constant throughout all the servants. Even though we served under the same master, the thing underneath the bed only wanted to cling to Choi Lee-kyung. Its eyes were not yet overtaken by madness, nor did its movements index anything strange.

Rather, it was hostile towards me, as if it knew I was attracted to the scent of Choi Lee-kyung’s blood. Even now I could sense that it was paying

keen attention to my movements from underneath the bed. The moment I laid a hand on Lee-kyung's body, it probably resolved to bite at my feet until their complete destruction.

'This is really dangerous…..'

At first, I had simply thought that I may lose reason if I were exposed to Choi Lee-kyung's blood. However, it was clearly not an ordinary urge if I had the impulse to make him bleed. Choi Lee-kyung was far too weak, and the only one on his side–at the worst situation–would be that skeleton, which was no match for me.

Above all, I had an ominous feeling that this impulse was not a singular issue that would fade away. So, I wracked my brain while sitting next to the still asleep Necromancer.

The best case scenario was, of course, to find what specific conditions trigger the appetite surge and to block those conditions. I usually thought of Choi Lee-kyung as a weak and occasionally frustrating ally, not some delicious hunk of meat. In the first place, I didn't have a human body that needed meals. But, if I wanted to eat his human flesh from time to time, then didn't it mean that there were certain triggers that stimulated these responses?

'There must be certain conditions…I just don't know what it is yet.'

However, this was the first time I felt such a morbid impulse. There were countless parts of this desire that tugged unpleasantly at my heart, so it was unreasonable to experiment with my behavior to figure these conditions out. In other words, I was still unable to block future surges of this appetite.

'I'll need some way to stop this appetite after it appears…..but how?'

This was a huge problem. The best method would be to prevent me through force, but Choi Lee-kyung had no such ability. The same went for the skeleton.

I thought about teaching him some self-defense, but, on top of time, who was to say that I wouldn't go crazy and fail to treat him gently? The same went for useful items. Even if I could give Choi Lee-kyung a legendary item, he may die before he could activate it.

'Then, that means I'll need to stop myself…'

I recalled how I cleared my mind from the pain of the dismembered finger.

'If I'm in pain, I won't think of anything else and calm down afterwards… Is self-harm necessary?'

However, thinking of how I might need to cut off a pinky for every time my appetite might surge…I may soon go crazy.

All of a sudden, in the midst of my crazed thoughts, I thought about the [Doppelganger curse].

The [Doppelganger curse] was a summoning-type skill that manifested a doppelganger. When the skill is first used, something similar to a transparent slime is summoned onto the battlefield; it soon copies the enemy's appearance and takes its shape.

Of course, the true enemy would attack the skill construct; oddly enough, the enemy would soon be injured in the same spot that it attacked on the doppleganger, forcing it to desist and run away.

In other words, the curse skill implied that if the enemy tried to truly kill the doppelganger with a strong attack, the main body would die.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Seo Dawon has it worse than Lackey–Choi Lee-kyung is his salvation, but he’s filled with the contrary desire to devour him. I can’t imagine that it’d be easy for him to admit that–but also I could understand why he placed so much protective spells…for his own sanity.

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Chapter 137

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Of course, even I only barely knew of this [Doppelganger Curse] existence; I haven't actually learned it.

I was a mage that specialized in destructive skills or area of effect skills. I had no interest nor talent for curses, so I only had knowledge of the few famous ones.

'However, wouldn't I be able to succeed at an imitation?'

Using the Doppelganger curse, if I were to attack Choi Lee-kyung, I would injure myself in the same location as the attack.

The issue, though, still stood; even if I were not to attack Choi Lee-kyung, his blood and injuries alone were enough to paralyze my reason.

However, I couldn't transfer all the changes made to Choi Lee-kyung to me; it was impossible to account for such a wide range of conditions. I could reduce that range, but if I did there would be many holes when the skill initiated. The result might be just the same as if nothing had been done.

'Above all, it's not good to do that–I could go mental in a different way…'

I'd feel the pain that occured in someone else's body. Of course, if this skill was successful, it would be fatal to my mental health. I may become sensitive to sudden pain and try, eventually, to completely control Choi Lee-

kyung. Who knows, maybe I'd imprison him or do something worse. There was no lower bar I could expect from my personality.

'I'll have to endure as much as I can.'

For a plan to succeed, one needed to know their subject well. So, throwing away thoughts of the [Doppelganger curse] and other such curses, I began to apply the basic protection skills on Choi Lee-kyung's body.

In addition, I placed restrictions on myself according to the degree of Choi Lee-kyung's potential injuries. Experience has shown that the allure of a small amount of blood could be resisted. The sudden and horrible impulses were accompanied by a conscious thought, 'this isn't a normal way of thinking.'

So, if Choi Lee-kyung were to get such an injury, I should also do my best to save him. So that it wouldn't get worse.

"……Next, for spells that would initiate on some command words: [Super Armor], [Teleport], [Shield]….." Pressing Choi Lee-kyung's forehead with my fingertips, I slowly adjusted the skills to activate according to my specified conditions.

As soon as I touched Choi Lee-kyung, the skeleton underneath the bed immediately popped out. It didn't dare approach anymore–simply restlessly observing us to make sure I wouldn't do anything harmful to its owner.

The golden color of the skill slowly filled the narrow room, twinkling like lights on the surface of the river. Choi Lee-kyung was wrapped with that golden effect; I quietly pulled away from him.

Soon afterwards, I placed my hand on my chest.

Now, it was time to use skills that would impose restrictions on me. This self-imposed limit was prepared in case Choi Lee-kyung bled profusely or was on the verge of death. With this active, even if I were to attack Choi Lee-kyung, the skill would activate the moment he was seriously injured, protecting him.

‘Thinking about it, my death would only subject us to a minor penalty: the inability to summon for a certain period of time. I wouldn’t be truly dead, though; that skeleton was completely trashed, and now it’s back.’

Actually, this idea came to mind when I saw that skeleton. I would revive 24 hours after ‘death.’ Additionally, I speculated that if Choi Lee-kyung were to be injured so badly, then the situation wouldn’t be an ordinary one. Perhaps we fell into a trap, or there may be enemies still left around. Once Choi Lee-kyung became incapacitated, I would need to initiate automatic navigation.

‘Anything moving around a seriously injured Choi Lee-kyung should be considered an enemy. By then I might have gone crazy, so simple guidelines may work.’

After much consideration, I set the [Mind Control] keyword.

‘If an enemy is found through [Search], I will proceed by overlapping the [Haste] and the [High Speed Sprint] skills during that battle. I’ll need to alter the specifications to use all the skills stored in [Memorize] simultaneously.’

With that, I could temporarily obtain powerful strength. In theory, buffs like [High Speed Sprint], which temporarily amplified all strengths when versing enemies, could overlap and be applied several times.

Though, once the buff subsided, the person might lose their life due to the accumulated burden on their body, so I hadn’t used that strategy. Even without overlapping these buffs, as soon as they exited the dungeon, the person would suffer enough pain to be wheeled to the hospital. That was why Bard’s and Priests’ side-effect-less buffs were so popular.

However, as an undead, I won’t die. When [High Speed Sprint] ends, I’ll be in great pain; at that point, my rationality should return.

In other words, I was aiming for that ‘side-effect.’ I could save Choi Lee-kyung’s life, and the pain from stacking the buffs would increase the probability that I’d return to my senses.

Even if I couldn’t return to my senses, I may not be able to stand the side-effects of [High Speed Sprint] and be reverse summoned–that result wouldn’t be too bad either. The 24-hour gap after reverse summoning where I wouldn’t be able to see Choi Lee-kyung would be a problem, but I could expect him to survive through the protective skills and [First Aid]. He would only need to endure one day of surviving alone.

I did as much as I could under the current circumstances–I was satisfied with that much. After programming the skills, I reopened my eyes.

Unlike before I closed my eyes, the skeleton was closer to the bed. Though it was visibly scared and trembled when I stared at it–but, it still looked ready to put itself in harms way. When I saw its pitiful appearance, my mouth started moving before I was consciously aware, “I’m not trying to do anything wicked to Choi Lee-kyung… I just applied some protection skills.”

[……]

So, I kindly explained this unexpected situation to the skeleton, but, perhaps because it was merely an undead, it didn’t seem to understand my words.

It didn’t even make the effort to pretend to listen to me; it simply looked only at its master. In that case, the desire to bully the skeleton rose within me. So, I very slightly pinched Choi Lee-kyung’s soft and squishy cheeks. The dumb skeleton straightened up and stared at me.

“What? You wanna try it too?”

[……]

The skeleton’s red eyes became narrowed in dissatisfaction. Perhaps I thought it resembled its master, I had thought if I poked at it a little longer, I’d be able to draw out a response. Unfortunately, the installation of the programmed skills was soon over, and the golden effect that filled the room slowly faded.

I rose from the bed after confirming that the skills I had given to Choi Lee-kyung were working as intended. Immediately afterwards, the skeleton jumped and climbed onto Choi lee-kyung's chest. It was only when the skeleton placed its ear to its master's heart that it wriggled its toes in reassurance.

"Cough!"

However, no matter how small the skeleton may be, Choi Lee-kyung must have the weight of a small child jumping on his chest; he woke up with a cough. The skeleton, paying no heed to how it was suffocating its master, looked up at Choi Lee-kyung as if it were so happy it could die.

Choi Lee-kyung, who finally came to his senses, finally locked eyes with me. His stare pierced me in several places; I closed my eyes, smiled, and said, "Slept well?"

* * *

'We talked about increasing our synchronization with spending more time intimately with each other. No way, has he kissed others in this kind of transactional context before……?' My thoughts, after my first kiss, were kind of moody and gloomy.

After all, Seo Dawon doesn't like me… No matter how much I racked my brains, I couldn't understand why he would choose to engage in this kind of behavior with me.

To be honest, I had also responded impulsively, but Seo Dawon doesn't even like men… He even preposterously claimed that he would date me if I had ordered it from him… After leaving well enough alone, why now? Was it simply curiosity?

"……"

"……" I was so utterly curious about his motive, but it felt weird to ask. To be precise, I was afraid that this atmosphere would be broken as soon as I asked the question.

After the kiss, I continued to sit in Seo Dawon's lap; he kept stroking the back of my head with one hand.

However, I couldn't be reassured by this fluffy atmosphere–if I were to ask why he kissed me, I might not receive a refreshing answer and instead hear something similar to, 'It's not as if I did it because I liked you.' Even if I expected to some extent to hear something like that, such an answer would hurt my heart…

I hesitated for a long while; Seo Dawon patiently stared at me squirming in his lap.

"S-So…about intimacy…"

At that moment, Seo Dawon's hands paused for a moment. Involuntarily, words started flooding out of my mouth.

I felt my subconscious opened my mouth as if to say 'if you're going to get hit, let's get it over with early.' Rather than hear the expected lines from Seo Dawon, I wanted to take the initiative and say 'this is just business…'–to make a preemptive attack on the player in this game. I guess I wanted to protect my self-esteem, no matter how low it may be…

However, Seo Dawon didn't even listen to all of my words. "You aren't, perhaps, suggesting that I sucked your tongue in order to increase our intimacy?"

"Ah, no…um…nghhh…"

"Yeah, it's not that. You want to claim that there's nothing there?"

"……"

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Back to Lee-kyung’s POV and present times!

‘Sucked tongues,’ so direct, Seo Dawon >///<

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Chapter 138

Chapter 138

I’m speechless. Of course, I was someone who couldn’t act upon non-existent feelings. But maybe Seo Dawon…

However, Seo Dawon–who I have no idea what he made what of my silence–adorned an inexplicable smile before drawing me to his chest. Before I was made to hug him again, I managed to push at his chest, stopping him by creating some distance between us.

“……”

However, even after stopping him, I could not say what I wanted to ask with ease. Questions like: Why did you kiss me? Is it because you have feelings for me? What would you like to happen in the future…?

But, while I stammered, Seo Dawon reached out and began stroking my messy hair once again. He, in a faultlessly calm manner, said, “Trying to do something when there is nothing is impossible so don’t even dream about it

Of course, his tone was flutteringly quiet, but the content didn’t seem so sweet. Somehow, I felt threatened, so I flinched before looking at him. Seo Dawon was staring straight back, with that same inexplicable smile that I couldn’t read–did that smile herald his good or bad mood?

“Why didn’t you ‘command’ me when I told you to in the first place?”

“What?”

“Then, I could’ve stopped if you had told me to stop…”

I couldn’t understand at all what Seo Dawon was saying, but I got the feeling that he genuinely felt some pity and sympathy for me. However, before I could further ask about its meaning, Seo Dawon stood up while holding me. He then carried me to my room. “Sleep well.”

“Hey, wait a bit… I still–!”

“Let’s talk about the rest tomorrow. You’re [sleepy now], right?”

I tried in my own ways to stop him from leaving, but as soon as he finished speaking, unbearable sleepiness hit me as if someone had slammed the back of my head.

Belatedly, I could see the faint silhouette of Lackey chasing after me into the room; soon, I felt the soft feel of a blanket on my cheek. I tried to swear at him, “Crazy bastard!” But, opening my mouth to do that was my last memory before passing out.

* * *

I woke up and looked down at Lackey’s rounded back burrowed into my arms and quickly remembered all that had happened last night. As I was returning to my senses, I ran, loudly thumping, to open the door and sprinted into the umami-scented kitchen.

“Hey, Seo Dawon!”

“…..Now, you even search only for hyung as soon as you wake up.”

However, the person cooking was Jung Garam and not the Mage. The young Assassin looked back at me with a slightly sulky expression and not his usual sly grin.

Since Seo Dawon was always the one who cooked, I was so sure he'd be there… Feeling a bit embarrassed, I relaxed my frown and asked Jung Garam, "Huh? Ah… It's nothing–where's Seo Dawon?"

"Dunno."

Slam–! Jung Garam's lips stuck out even more as he dropped the egg-fried rice down on the table.

Pushed by the momentum of his glare, I sat at the table for now. "Mmm…"

It seems as if Jung Garam had cooked it himself. Honestly, I felt a bit sorry to compare them, but compared to what Seo Dawon usually made the dish was a bit clumsy.

Jung Garam, sitting across from me, glared with his eyes, "Is Dawon hyung's food more delicious or mine?"

"… B-Both are tasty…"

"…… You've improved your social perception." [1]

That… wouldn't everyone improve in front of an Assassin wielding a knife? Eventually, with a teary face, I ate all of the salty and bitter egg fried rice.

Perhaps his mood was lightened, Jung Garam cut an apple for dessert when I finished breakfast. Fortunately, it was peeled normally so I could rinse my mouth with its taste.

When Jung Garam's pouting lips had finally returned to its original shape, I carefully asked again, "About Seo Dawon…"

"Ah, stop talking about Seo Dawon hyung. No, that hyung isn't even a hyung anymore–he's now just 'Seo Dawon-ssi.'"

Bewildered by the extreme response, I asked, "Why… Did you guys fight yesterday?"

“……” Jung Garam stopped talking and turned bemused eyes towards me.

“Hm?”

“Hyung and I were going to share a pizza, right?”

“Uh? Can you eat food?”

“But, Hyung waited in front of the front gates and ate it all by himself.”

“That…”

“Trusting hyung, I just waited with a raised fork.”

“……”

For some reason…I don’t think he’s actually talking about pizza… After speculating that the relationship between these two seemed to have soured because of me, I shut up despite my complicated feelings.

Jung Garam didn’t seem to intend to speak clearly, considering his roundabout pizza talk. Crunching sounds filled the silence between us.

“Did your fever get any better?” Suddenly, the door that connected the utility room and the kitchen opened, and Kim Olim came in. The words came out of nowhere, but it seemed like they were directed at me–I nodded.

“So, that means you’re in a normal condition right now…” With that said, Kim Olim glanced at me out of the corners of her eyes and murmured something incomprehensible. Then, with a pleading tone, she continued, “Necromancer. When you make important decisions, you must first check your condition.”

“Uh? Uh… What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

“Whether you ate well, you slept enough, or to check for any aches in your body…It wouldn’t be considered too late to make the decision after first checking on your physical status.”

“Mmm… T-That’s true…” I nodded without much thought, because what she said was just so fundamental. At my words, Kim Olim’s frowning expression relaxed.

However, before she could continue speaking, I could feel a chilling touch on the back of my nape, “Did you sleep well?”

“Eek!”

“……”

“…..”

I didn’t know since when he stood behind me, but Seo Dawon began to speak affectionately, silently touching my neck from behind.

Unlike me, who jumped straight up in surprise, Kim Olim and Jung Garam stared at Seo Dawon with a hostile expression. The atmosphere became sensitive enough to overshadow the awkwardness of the jump.

‘Just…Why are they like this…’

Wasn’t the vibe pretty good around the three of them just yesterday?

However, from then until now, Seo Dawon’s mood became more lighthearted than dirty, and the other two were full of dissatisfaction with the Mage.

Disregarding them, Seo Dawon bowed his head towards me and placed a kiss on my cheek, as if he were displaying for the others to see. Everything felt so natural, I lost the timing to push him away.

“Y-You…what…” I stuttered.

“Did you eat well?”

“The food was…No, the food isn’t the issue here!”

“So shy…” Seo Dawon smiled, as if he were looking at something super cute… I got goosebumps from his unusual attitude and retreated three steps from him. What’s wrong with him!

“Ah…how annoying.” Of course, Jung Garam did not remain a peaceful observer. Kim Olim stepped between me and the Mage and blocked him from approaching me.

Additionally, Jung Garam, with a completely angry expression, skewered the marble table with a fruit knife and began to interrogate Seo Dawon, “You used [Mind Control] on Choi Lee-kyung. Correct?”

“No?”

“Don’t make me laugh. Choi Lee-kyung had always been scared of hyung.”

“Well……”

“Hyung is… Hyung isn’t in a position to be able to criticize Koo Hui-seo.”

“Is that so?” Seo Dawon, adopting a cheeky expression, responded half-heartedly to Jung Garam.

Frozen, I could only watch the back and forth conflict, ‘But, what’s [Mind Control]…?’

Meanwhile, Kim Olim suddenly turned back at me and asked, “Choi Lee-kyung. Didn’t you feel any indications of Seo Dawon using any skills on you yesterday?”

“What?”

“Have you suddenly thought that Seo Dawon was attractive? Or have you felt like your breath hitched around him?”

“T-That’s…”

Honestly, I felt that a few times, but I stuttered, unable to properly explain.

Kim Olim squinted, “As expected… Inappropriate methods must have been used.” Then, looking at Seo Dawon once more, she spoke in a contemptuous tone, “Trying to possess someone by manipulating their mind… Are you insane?”

It was as if they couldn’t believe that I would like Seo Dawon if I were sane.

Seo Dawon shrugged, holding back his laughter–it felt like he was teasing me and the others. “It’s possible that Lee-kyung-ie might like me.”

“As if.”

“Don’t give me that bullcrap!”

Kim Olim and Jung Garam responded to Seo Dawon’s sarcastic remarks simultaneously.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Kim Olim and Jung Garam would be the woman in this meme. Seo Dawon is the corpse she’s carrying behind her.

Footnotes

1. I didn’t really know how best to word this in English. Nunchi has been used several times before, but there’s always english equivalents. Here, Nunchi would mean something similar to “Social Perception.” Garam is saying that Lee-kyung now knows what to say so that he doesn’t offend others.

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Chapter 139

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“Currently, you have nothing except for your appearance.”

“That’s right! And Choi Lee-kyung likes small and cute things.”

“……”

Seo Dawon turned to look at me before turning away, biting his lips. Anyone could see that he was holding back his laughter. Jung Garam and Kim Olim were too agitated to see that, though.

“Um…” I started.

“And also, Hyung had always only dated girls! Choi Lee-kyung’s a man!”

“It was only a week ago that you promised to try and fix your obsession.”

“Excuse me…”

“If it’s like this, won’t you start dating a girl after reviving?”

“I won’t forgive you if you do something like that.”

“I’ll kill you for real……”

“Please….! Listen! To what I’m saying!” I yelled, eventually.

[Clack Clack!]

Only then did the overheated atmosphere subside. I sighed and addressed the eight red pupils staring at me, “I…would like it if Seo Dawon and. I could speak alone. At least at first…”

“……”

“……”

“Okay. The irrelevant people should get out of the way.” Seo Dawon said, adding unnecessarily mean words and pushing the momentarily calmed Jung Garam away, before approaching me. I was a bit startled when Seo Dawon placed his arms around me, but, like that, I was dragged into the master bedroom.

Slam–

As soon as the door closed, I removed Seo Dawon’s arm from me and crossed mine. He, still utterly aloof, stepped down coolly.

However, every time I retreated one step, he just approached me by the same amount. It was as if he was trying to not allow more than a certain distance between us. I was concerned with that attitude, but I ignored that and began to talk, “You…”

“Choi Lee-kyung.” Seo Dawon called my name and cut me off. I shut my mouth at the unexpected interruption; he, without being roundabout, spoke straightforwardly, “I wasn’t joking yesterday.”

“That…”

“That’s what you wanted to hear, right?”

I would definitely be angry if I heard it was all a joke. I nodded reluctantly, and Seo Dawon lowered his eyes. It was as if he were carefully choosing his words, so I waited without rushing him.

After a short silence, Seo Dawon continued, slowly speaking, “And, I’m sure you’re curious as to why I did what I did…”

“Yeah…”

“But, it’s hard to put into words my feelings for you.”

“…Why?”

“It’s my first time feeling like this. I’ve never felt this way before.”

“……”

‘Is that because he kissed a guy?’ The thought suddenly crossed my mind. Well, I floundered a lot when I first realized my sexuality; I was confused and wanted to deny everything…

However, Seo Dawon’s following words were somehow strange.

“That’s why—just in case–if I suddenly try to attack or imprison you, I’ll show you how to stop me.”

“Um….What? W-What did you say?”

“If I become weird in a different way, I’ll tell you how to reverse summon me.”

Honestly…Didn’t he mean to say something emotional…? Something like ‘he fell in love with me,’ or ‘he was momentarily swept away by the atmosphere?’ What sort of out-of-the-blue thing was he talking about?

The change of subject was so off kilter that I was momentarily rendered speechless. Seo Dawon looked at my flustered self before sighing and walking one step closer.

However, for some reason, I felt a bit terrified of his approach. I instinctively retreated, but the rapidly tensing mood would not relieve itself. Seo Dawon moved slowly, driving me into the corner.

“W-What is it…Wait a minute!”

“Your body is responding to my bloodthirst. It’s natural–there’s no reason to think that it’s weird.” Seo Dawon muttered slowly, watching me step backwards.

I was asking you to explain why your bloodthirst had risen or why you’re approaching me like this though!

However, as the atmosphere felt like it was tightening around my neck, the courage to joke or shout left me. Now, drenched in cold sweat, I stepped back towards the bed.

“So, Lee-kyung ah, remember this feeling well. If I suddenly approach you like this or say something strange to you…” Before I fell onto the bed, Seo Dawon grabbed my shoulders and whispered gently, “Say [—-]. Understand?”

“What……?”

“Since it’d be troublesome if you say it by mistake, I ‘locked’ it. You’ll automatically be able to speak the word when necessary.”

At those words, my legs lost all strength and I flopped onto the mattress.

“You, really……”

“I’m sorry. There’s not much I could say to make the explanation make sense right now.” Seo Dawon apologized with a face that didn’t seem sorry at all.

A little while earlier, the Mage placed a strange suggestion on me. I had no idea what exactly it entailed, but my head kept imagining the eerie feeling of being forcibly held at knifepoint.

I vividly felt anxious about what would happen to Seo Dawon if I were to say [that word] that I could not pronounce at the moment. I couldn’t stand the idea that such a creepy thing may occur against my will. I lowered my face into my two hands. “What the hell…are you doing.”

“I’m doing what’s necessary…..something that must be done even if you despise it.”

In the end, Seo Dawon had no desire to explain. Whether I misunderstood him or hated him, it was as if he were telling me to feel however I wanted.

Bracing myself for dismissal, once again I asked him, “Why…to me… Haah…”

“……”

“Why must you go this far… It makes me think you’ll be hurt by me.”

“…Because, that’s how I want it.”

I was stunned at the unexpected answer.

It was true that Seo Dawon has often made me feel anxious or intimidated. I had thought that his personality was terribly oppressive and that he was a perfectionist.

So, while I thought that Seo Dawon was coercive, I thought he was ignoring me because he thought my abilities were trivial. Days that were spent happily, days that he suddenly became cold despite what I thought was a progressing relationship. I remembered being swayed between those two moods and asked, hopeful, “Perhaps… the scary way you crave for my being…is that the reason why?”

“Mm, like what?”

“That… When I say something or mumble, you stare intensely at me. When we lock gazes, you turn your head away…” [1]

“I don’t know about that.”

He’s pretending to not know. However, throughout this conversation, it seems like I’ve found some clues about his extreme behavior.

Seo Dawon is holding in some dangerous impulse–an urge he has no control over. But, it must have been tolerable at first? That feeling must have gotten worse as time flowed on…

‘…….It must be incredibly painful.’

Even with that personality, I was able to grasp some hints with my dense head; perhaps his feelings are exploding after being patient for such a long time? If so, what’s the cause? Was Seo Dawon exposed to any serious harm or curse while I remained ignorant?

‘……Curse?’

At that moment, a name flashed across my mind. ‘Koo Hui-seo…?’

So I hurriedly asked, “Are you injured? Or…”

Seo Dawon answered obediently, “It’s not something like an injury. Perhaps it’s more like a penalty. For now…”

“……”

“But, I think I’m drawing closer to the limit of my self-control.” Seo Dawon said calmly, before sitting with a thud next to me.

However, even after revealing all that, he had no further words to add. Now, rather than being frustrated by his incomprehensible attitude, I thought that he must be constrained by some circumstances. Before I asked, he was unable to say it…And even if I asked, he was unable to express himself properly…

“What that exactly is… I guess you can’t really tell me.”

Seo Dawon did not confirm nor deny and simply stared at me. By those actions, I was convinced of my guess.

‘It feels like he’s under some ban. He’s not allowed to say whatever it is by his own mouth…Or perhaps there are specific conditions to his silence.’

“Then… Then maybe…does kissing me bring you some relief?” I asked.

If so, then does skinship improve or have a big effect on his obsession with ‘me’? Seo Dawon’s random kiss could be explained through this logic.

I looked at him, that thought lingering in my mind.

But, pausing for a moment, Seo Dawon answered with a chuckle, “Does that make sense? That was something I just wanted to do.”

“W….What?”

“What kind of mental illness could ever be cured with kisses?”

“No, I mean…”

“Are you a doctor?”

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: There’s a lot here but, to sum it up–

Dawon’s bloodlust had gotten worse through time–he did something and was perhaps…penalized for it? I’m just as blind as many of you guys– maybe he tried to go against the system? Similarly, Seo Dawon seems to be confused as to what his feelings entail. (Understandable, there’s so many influences on him, he must be just as confused as MC).

Poor MC though. I wouldn’t know what to do with what essentially amounts to a remote control to a kill button or a shock collar.

Footnotes

1. This is intentionally vague btw. What Choi Lee-kyung is saying could be symptoms of a crush on someone, but also could be reminiscent of Seo Dawon’s obsession for his blood/body/everything.

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Chapter 140

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Seo Dawon grabbed my arm to stop me, red-faced from embarrassment, from running away. Then he spoke in a sarcastic tone, “You followed such nice reasoning for everything in the middle and then suddenly had a logical leap for the kiss…Is that because you can’t stop thinking about kissing me?”

“No, you just suddenly scared me and…Damn it, release my arm!”

“If I just had a little less conscience, I would be the world’s first kissing treatment patient…”

“Eek!”

Shamelessly, he rested his head in my embrace. Then, as if to sort out all that had happened, he whispered, “Anyway, since I’ve been a bit capricious lately, don’t approach me if I seem suspicious. That’s all I wanted to say.”

“……” I was still rendered speechless from the lingering uncomfortable feeling that would not subside.

Even though I did not reply, Seo Dawon still released my two arms that he was holding; he still leaned his body into my embrace, however. If I were to push him away, I could stand up chicly; instead, I simply hugged him after hesitating.

I felt a low vibration near my heart; Seo Dawon laughed and looked up at me, “Lee-kyung-ie definitely doesn’t miss any opportunity.”

“…Shut up. You…you also did whatever you wanted.” Even as I said that, I was afraid he’d remove his hands from me and stand up. However, Seo Dawon peacefully remained in my arms.

I thought, ‘Well, now that I think about it, It’s been far too easy…’

Even now, when Seo Dawon couldn’t show off all of his abilities and is restrained, I couldn’t feel any of his limitations.

When something inexplicably goes smoothly, rather than feeling satisfied with your good luck, you may start to feel anxious. As if there’s a ticking time bomb that may explode at any moment. So, now that the cause of my anxiety had been vaguely pinpointed, I actually felt more relieved. Furthermore, I became more confident about a contradiction I had been pondering for a while now.

‘For servants…their master must be an essential existence.’

That must be the reason why such a cumbersome contract method was needed.

After signing a contract with these servants, I had often fallen deep into thought about the significance of my existence. After all, I was being dragged around by those who were worlds apart in ability from me.

It was a bit frustrating, but things tended to work out only when I listened to their orders; even if they were to elaborate beyond the bare skeleton of information, they might take the attitude, ‘what good would it do for you to know?

The fact that all this was unintentional made the situation more miserable. Just as how parents may not tell their children how much they make–even though making a living was important for their livelihoods–it was natural for the servants to act this way since what would change if ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ knew anything…what could he do for them?

As a result, even if we shared the same home, we didn’t feel quite like a team. It felt like we were divided into two: me and them.

However, their selfish arbitrariness had led to Seo Dawon handing me some strange self-destruct device. If so, though he may not like to admit it, couldn't it be said that Seo Dawon's current method had failed?

"Seo Dawon."

"Yeah."

"Before…When you asked me to 'command' you, what did you mean?"

Of course, it wasn't like I was happy at Seo Dawon's failure, nor did I think 'You reap what you sow.' Actually, wasn't it more weird to think that I would become a necessary existence to someone like Seo Dawon? If I were the Mage, I would've desperately searched for another way besides relying on Choi Lee-kyung.

However, in another sense, I felt refreshed.

I may be able to finally know why it 'had to be me.'

Through a series of serendipitous coincidences, I was able to meet and contract with Seo Dawon. But there were days where I wondered why, except for the contract, I needed to be in this team. I had thought, 'It didn't have to be me, they could have had a more talented Necromancer.'

That's why I tried in any way I could to contribute to the team, but my power was so utterly weak that there was no benefit. In addition, I hated to see Seo Dawon, Jung Garam, or Kim Olim taking risks–leading the front, so I may not fall into danger. In the end, I naturally thought that 'sitting around patiently, doing nothing' was all I could do to help.

However, I felt like I could finally grasp at my purpose–something I've questioned even as I adjusted my behavior to accommodate them. Seo Dawon was shaking. Now, he looked confused; the distance, which he had stubbornly maintained yesterday, between us had narrowed.

So, I brought up the question I should have asked then. At that time, I didn't want to think deeper because I had simply passed his comment off as

mere rejection, but, once you dug deeper, the words he chose were quite strange.

Why did he use the word, ‘command?’ There were many other gentle methods to reject me. It’s not as if he wasn’t the type of person who would be smooth enough to reject me kindly.

However, that’s what Seo Dawon said.

If so, did that ‘command’ contain another meaning?

“I meant it literally. Since you’re the master, there’s no need to walk on eggshells around me.”

“……” I couldn’t really tell what he was thinking just through his expression. I couldn’t tell if I was dense, or if Seo Dawon was deliberately hiding his emotions, but…

I gripped onto Seo Dawon’s arms when he tried to stop leaning his head on me, sit up, and straighten his back. If not this time, I don’t know when this distance between us would narrow again. Fortunately, Seo Dawon did not remove my hold and gently downcast his red eyes.

“T-then, if it’s my command…… Are you saying that you would like me?”

“The command has to be specific. ‘Like me…’ It’s not clear what kind of behavior you want me to showcase.” Seo Dawon naturally continued.

I realized he was giving me advice: a reminder that when a Master gives a command, he must give specific instructions that a Servant could comprehend and act upon straight away.

So, I took his advice and ‘commanded’ him. “Answer the questions I ask. Don’t lie, either.”

Seo Dawon, knowing that he was given a ‘command,’ raised his head as soon as I spoke. Normally, his eyes were like transparent glass, but

somehow they looked hazy and decadent now. I hesitated, feeling a hint of resistance from him, but Dawon soon slowly lowered his head.

“Yes,” he responded, quietly. He adopted an attitude of total obedience– enough that I suspected it was a prank to ridicule me.

* * *

A few minutes passed by; I couldn’t find the words to speak easily. I was flustered by the completely transformed atmosphere, and Seo Dawon was still utterly tranquil. And then, right before my eyes, a system message popped up.

[Conditions have been met to expand or transform certain skills unique to your class.]

“Skills unique to the class……?”

“…..” Seo Dawon continued to look at me with that placid expression. It was as if he was paying great attention to the words that came out of my mouth.

I reminded myself that I was in the middle of “commanding” him and subconsciously covered my mouth with one hand and hastily closed the system message with the other. After all, I can check the contents of this message later…

“Hmmm…I mean, s-so…you can’t answer the questions I ask from this point on by lying, right?”

“Yes.”

“I can’t get used to him using such formal language…Ah, n-no.” I stuttered.

When I saw Seo Dawon with a face devoid of any expressions, I felt like I was doing something malicious to him.

I cleared my throat and once again asked the question I wanted to ask, “Why did you suddenly place such a strange taboo on me?”

The thing that bothered me the most was the unknown skill that Seo Dawon applied to me just recently.

And, as soon as I closed my mouth, he answered straight away without any hesitation. “That’s a taboo placed just in case I attempted to murder you.”

Murder…

Goosebumps raised along my arms at his word choice, and I felt slightly depressed that Seo Dawon would dislike me enough to kill me. Further, it felt unfair–why would he hold those sorts of feelings for me?

“Why do you want to kill me?” I asked

“I’ve never wanted to kill you. I’ve told you earlier that the taboo was placed in order to stop me from murdering you.”

Again, another strange response.

No, that’s what I’m asking–you said you placed a restriction just in case you’d murder me. There must be a reason, then, right? Only his speech was formal, his speaking style still left an unpleasant aftertaste…

I judged Seo Dawon’s expressionless face as one of contempt, and, rage rising, I continued to question him, voice wheezing. “So! That’s why I’m asking…Why you might want to murder me!? What I wanted to know was the reason behind it all!”

“It’s because of your blood.”

TL: It’s been a while hasn’t it? I’ve been swamped with IRL work (grading papers T_T). I’ve informed the discord server people that this break would happen–if you haven’t joined, that’s alright! I do update about any potential breaks there, though. As promised, I’ll do 4 chapters–2 today, 2 tomorrow!

Also I do know that there’s a webtoon that’s out! Although, I have no idea if that’ll divert more or less people to this, haha.

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Chapter 141

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‘……Blood?’

Subconsciously, I placed my hand on my neck and fiddled with it. ‘Why would my blood matter when he’s talking about preparing for my possible murder? And I’ve not really bled much around him either…’

But, as soon as I had those thoughts, I glanced towards Seo Dawon; his eyes were trained on my neck, figuratively lapping at it. Startled, I reflexively leaned back. It felt like I’d been captured by a hungry beast.

‘I didn’t think it was possible… Does he truly want to drink my blood?’ I didn’t voice those thoughts–it was obvious just by looking at his expression… A strange silence dropped between the speechless me and him.

To think that Seo Dawon saw me as prey to eat… Of course, as a rational human being, he must have tried to prevent himself from doing just that.

‘In any case, he wanted to eat me to the point of needing to restrain himself.’

It was enough to unsettle me, who had liked him all this while. One may say that I should have realized this sooner, but I recognized, for the first time, that he was something truly ‘other’ than a human.

On the other hand, since he couldn’t eat normally, perhaps he truly needed my blood.

After all, some people donated their blood regularly; I wondered if I could give him enough blood without harming my overall health. Perhaps, I had received this news with a bit of anticipation, thinking that this might give meaning to my existence. “Um, excuse me… Can’t I help if this is something you want to drink? I can give it as long as it doesn’t affect my livelihood…”

However, that thought was immediately dwarfed by Seo Dawon’s suddenly cold expression.

A hostility that I had not felt before wrapped around us. With an awkward expression, I continued, trying to correct my previous statement, “If you don’t like that idea…”

“I don’t like it.” Seo Dawon answered immediately.

Just thinking about the hastiness of that response soured my mood.

I was a bit offended by his reply; the mage rarely expressed his disgust. I should have been relieved by his firm answer that he would not eat me, but, like a fool, I fell into a mental pitfall, thinking that he was rejecting my blood in particular.

“Ah, Mmm… If you need someone else’s blood…”

“You’re asking if I want to eat some other human’s blood?”

“Um, yes…”

“I’ve never once felt that way.” At my repeated questions, Seo Dawon’s expression gradually became harsher and harsher–it felt as if he were saying, ‘Stop asking about this.’

Looking at that face, I inwardly scoffed. ‘If you’re going to be like that, then what’s the point of asking me to ‘command’ you as I please…’

Sure, his tone may sound respectful, but, from the look on his face, if I truly did as I wished, we were bound to have troubles.

I mean, if you needed some blood–and it had to be *my* blood–why not just partake in it? Why must he be so hung up on maintaining such a dangerous, tenuous balance that seemed risky even from an outsider's perspective?

'Perhaps, can he not control himself?'

Maybe his situation was similar to a vampire's? Of course, I'd never seen an actual vampire, but in movies, they usually went crazy at the sight of blood and ran amok with no care as to the consequences…

If Seo Dawon was feeling those same urges, perhaps he was thinking, 'I may want to consume blood, but, since I may kill Choi Lee-kyung, I don't want to drink it at all?' Considering Seo Dawon's confidence and ego, it may be possible.

"About my 'commands'… In your current state, you have to obey everything I say, right?"

"Yes."

"You can't ever refuse?"

"Yes."

I confirmed the scope of these 'commands' with Seo Dawon.

As expected, this special ability must have absolute control over the Servants. Seeing someone with Seo Dawon's personality speaking so respectfully to me…it lent a lot of credibility to that theory.

"Sit still for a minute. Don't move until I tell you to move." I ordered.

"……"

I remained skeptical of its efficacy, but, right after I gave the command, Seo Dawon stared at me in an upright position. A subtle change in the atmosphere gave me confidence that he was faithfully following my orders.

“Whew…” So, I took a deep breath and pulled a dagger out of my inventory. While taking it out, I glanced at Seo Dawon; although he didn’t move, I felt sharp tension pouring out from him.

As I set the blade on my palm, the vibe fluctuated even more erratically. And, at the center of that strange feeling, was Seo Dawon staring directly at me without blinking an eye. That unchanging line of sight intimidated me, but, in the end, I closed my eyes tight, gripped the dagger, and cut my palm.

‘Well, if he says I shouldn’t need to walk on eggshells and order him around…’

Feeling throbbing pain in my palm, I slowly opened my eyes.

However, Seo Dawon did not move as I had feared; in fact, there was no significant change in his expression either. It seemed as if the ‘command’ took priority over his desire for my blood.

Of course, the strange atmosphere still filled the room, but at least my life was not threatened. So, looking at the blood slowly pooling in my hand, I thought about how I should deliver this blood to Seo Dawon. ‘It would have been nice if I had a cup…’

Should I go to the kitchen? I belatedly blamed myself for slitting my palms before thinking it through. It would have been prudent if I had gotten a cup in advance before I injured myself. It would be unhygienic to make him lick my palms, and the Mage may feel humiliated if I asked him to do that…

“Haah……”

However, all those thoughts vanished at the sound of Seo Dawon’s constrained breaths.

I looked at him in surprise; Seo Dawon was still motionless, but the atmosphere surrounding him was more eerie and cloying than before. Of course, he was still obeying my order.

The pressure grew as time passed; I suppressed my nervousness and held a bloody hand out to the Mage. “You can drink it. In return, you have to stop when I tell you to stop.”

“……” Seo Dawon lowered his eyes, as if he were docilely obeying my words. Then, he gripped onto my fingers with one hand.

I faltered at the slight force drawing me closer to him, but I tried to not let my nervousness show and forced my tense shoulders to relax. When his lips touched my palm, I remained calm, ignoring the bitter, stinging pain.

However, Seo Dawon did not move after burying his lips on my palm. Even after I gave him permission, he did not drink. “U-um, if you don’t want to…”

Embarrassed, I wondered if I had somehow misunderstood him and tried to pull my hand away, but I was caught by a force that couldn’t be compared to the gentleness from the pull from before. As if waking up from deep sleep, Seo Dawon opened his eyes with a tranquil expression.

He then wiped clean the blood on his lips with the back of my hand. It felt like he resolved to not drink, but, for such a resolution, his behavior was a bit tenacious.

I blushed against my will. Seo Dawon looked up at me and whispered softly, “I said I didn’t want to partake, but…”

“Ah…”

“That’s not what I’m starving for.” With that said, Seo Dawon licked my wrist. Flustered, I twisted my wrist in his grasp; he tightened his grip, crushing the recent cut I had made.

“Nngh…!” It was painful enough to bring tears to my eyes, but Seo Dawon did not reduce the force of his grip even after hearing my groans. Rather, he bothered the injury, dealing unbearable pain.

Eventually, I shouted, “Stop! Stop…”

He immediately released his strength and took his hand away. I was shocked to see the ragged edges of the wound, that made it look as if I had torn instead of cut my palm.

“I think you finally understand now,” Seo Dawon placidly said.

“…What?”

“That’s how you should ‘command’ me.”

* * *

I healed the wound on my hand with the potions left in my inventory and ended the ‘command’ I had given Seo Dawon. After the Mage’s eyes returned to normal, he left the room without a word of apology to me.

I gave up on trying to understand him–I could only guess that my interference in his plans had somehow offended him.

“Why does Lee-kyung-ie look like he’s eaten shit?” However, it was hard to find the time to be depressed alone. Jung Garam casually opened the locked door and dragged me out, saying we should have dinner. With a glum expression, Seo Dawon placed fried rice, glossy from oil, in front of me.

Automatically, I wanted to call him out for his crazed actions, but, not wanting to show those feelings, I fiddled with the chopsticks. Immediately afterwards, Jung Garam began to question me.

TL: Lots of emotions to work through. Lee-kyung knows a bit more about Seo Dawon's condition now–how there's forces beyond his control. Yet, in his desire to be useful (because Lee-kyung can definitely feel how much of a burden he is in his current state and will work on that) Seo Dawon felt dehumanized. The mage doesn't want to use Lee-kyung as a blood bag T_T. Nor does he want to feel inhuman.

Next time: Action–Park Hosoek!

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Chapter 142

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“…….It’s nothing.”

“He’s upset [1] because breakfast didn’t taste good.”

I also didn’t want the after-effects of our disharmony to show, but Seo Dawon’s cold response stung my sensibilities. I mean, no matter how much the other tried to help, how could you pretend to be so intimate after making a mess and leaving?

I stared at Seo Dawon’s tranquil self. But, because Jung Garam angrily shouted, ‘What, it’s my first time cooking!” I missed the chance to be angry at the Mage.

Eventually, I silently swallowed a sigh–because there was nothing wrong with the food–and forced myself to swallow a bite of the fried rice.

“I think we can proceed with the operation faster than we thought.” Kim Olim placed her laptop on the table, fiddled with it alone, and then turned the screen towards us to show us something. On it was a picture of Park Hoseok, our target for next week, being issued tickets at the airport.

“This information arrived in the morning; it’s said that Park Hoseok is headed to Jeju Island. We don’t know what for, but he said he was in a hurry and is moving secretly without a security detail.”

“Without the family too?” Jung Garam, whose eyes shone when it came to matters regarding Park Hosek, immediately squeezed himself between

Kim Olim and me and concentrated on the screen.

Kim Olim nodded gently. “Koo Hui-seo was the one who handed this information to us. According to him, Koo Kyungman enjoyed golf as a hobby and stopped by Jeju Island whenever he had a break. Also, the family villa Park Hoseok purchased in Jeju Island was close to a villa owned by Koo Kyungman.”

“Then, why is he moving alone this time?”

“According to Koo Hui-seo, the police had expanded their scope to Jeju Island during the investigation into Koo Kyungman’s whereabouts. He thinks he’s acting upon that news. There must be something hidden all the way out there.”

Since Koo Kyungman was currently in custody, he couldn’t contact Park Hoseok. However, as he became a prime suspect in Chairwoman Shin’s murder and the police couldn’t find his location, it seemed that his personal villa and his entourage had become implicated in the fires of suspicion.

Since Park Hoseok was previously affiliated with the [Red Dragon], he had no choice but to be entangled with Koo Kyungman. Both of them had not lived conscientiously until now.

“Perhaps……there’s something at the Jeju Island villa?”

“Because of that, Koo Hui-seo was caught on that detail as well. He asked his brother how many times he visited his villa and how often he traveled with Park Hoseok: Koo Kyungman said he visited about 20 times last year, and 14 of them were spent with Park Hoseok.” As she said that, Kim Olim showed the documents requesting approval for vacation, which drew from the company’s public funds.

…..No, 800 million won? No matter how rich you may be, how could you spend 800 million won on a week-long vacation? Wouldn’t that mean he spent more than 100 million won a day?

However, while I was shocked by the cost, Seo Dawon asked Kim Olim a question after listening silently, “Did Koo Hui-seo ask his brother about his vacations in JeJu Island?”

“He asked, but it seems like he couldn’t ask thoroughly since Koo Kyungman’s condition is quite bad these days. He’s lost at least half of his language skills.”

‘Did he ask?’…I guess that was akin to asking if he had tortured him. I got goosebumps when I recalled Koo Kyungman’s creepy, dulled voice through the voice recorder.

Jung Garam confidently shouted, “Well, in any case, this is a good thing, right? He went alone without his security detail nor his bothersome family; we should get rid of him before he returns to Seoul Hub.”

“…….”

“We’re not fully prepared yet, but…I agree with Jung Garam’s opinion. It’s the best opportunity.”

Even in my opinion, it would be best to attack when Park Hoseok was separated from his security.

However, instead of readily agreeing, Seo Dawon looked at me; when we locked gazes, he turned away.

“……?”

“Fine. Then, let’s leave straight away on a morning flight.” Soon afterwards, Seo Dawon nodded, getting rid of the coyness he held while looking at me. I felt a bit awkward, but I couldn’t take the initiative to hold his attention because of the distance I felt from earlier events.

* * *

That evening, we finished our meal quickly and informed Koo Hui-seo that we would depart tomorrow.

Originally, it was not a simple procedure for Users to leave the hub and head to Gimpo Airport [2], but Koo Hui-seo had provided passes that [Red Dragon] guild executives used, allowing them to leave for Gimpo Airport at dawn without any hassle.

Koo Hui-seo, through his secretary, had not only sent passes but had also sent chauffeurs and luxury limousines. It was very considerate since I had no car, but the small amount of gratitude that I gained had shriveled up when we sat down in the rear seat and Koo Hui-seo's video was shown on the backseat screens.

[I recorded in a hurry because I was worried you'd forget my face… I had planned to greet you with Kyungman-ie, but he's a bit sensitive– perhaps because he's in the early stages of his pregnancy. So you won't get bored during your travels–]

When I forcibly turned off the screen, unable to endure it any longer, Jung Garam burst into uproarious laughter. "Ah, so fucking funny. Isn't Koo Hui-seo so hilarious? He recorded and sent a video to Lee-kyung-ie… but he thought of including Koo Kyungman too…"

I shook the arm that the younger was leaning on since the way he laughed so openly about another's misfortune was so despicable. However, Jung Garam said, "Did I record that video? Why are you frustrated with me?!" and clung even harder, tangling his arms with mine.

As soon as Koo Hui-seo's video turned on, Kim Olim raised her eyebrows; when I turned off the screen, she crossed her legs and closed her eyes. It seemed, though, that she wasn't able to completely relax; her eyes were open just a sliver, glaring at the turned-off screen.

And Seo Dawon, who I had been concerned about since yesterday, briefly looked my way before gazing out the window, as if he weren't interested.

"With how much he likes Lee-kyung-ie…how did he stop himself from following us?" In the meantime, Jung Garam continued to be annoying.

"The police are suspicious of Koo Hui-seo; it'll be hard for him to be at the front." Surprisingly, Kim Olim gave a serious answer to Jung Garam's jeers. With a frown, she continued, "There's no reason in the first place for the guild's successor to kill his stepmother and flee. In this case, Koo Hui-seo, the first one to report this incident, would be the most suspicious. If he were to get entangled in this mess, he'd be questioned intensively."

The investigation's focus was just barely out of Koo Hui-seo's way since no corpse was found and evidence of Koo Kyungman's wicked deeds were discovered.

It was honestly creepy for me when I had briefly convinced myself that all matters with Koo Kyungman had finished. Koo Hui-seo's potential downfall was not only his business, after all; I was deeply tied to it.

'It's not completely over yet…'

If so, then shouldn't we be cautious of our surroundings this time? Looking at Seo Dawon, who wouldn't tear his eyes away from the window, I speculated that he wasn't worried about whether or not Jung Garam would be able to beat Park Hoseok…but, instead, what would happen afterwards.

The young assassin was far from the type of person that would proceed carefully or think deeply about their actions. Furthermore, our revenge wasn't within legal bounds either.

"We've arrived."

However, I had no time to contemplate such matters deeply–the distance between the Seoul Hub and Gimpo Airport was close.

After traveling on an unobstructed road, we arrived at Gimpo Airport in about 30 minutes.

At the entrance of the Gimpo Airport, we went through the [User-only] gate. From there, the pass that Koo Hui-seo provided showed its strength.

Our trip certainly felt different from my high school field trip to Jeju Island, but the reception that came with the pass felt particularly awkward. The flight attendant personally came to the lounge; we only waited 30 minutes to board. Sweet comments like, ‘If you need anything, please let us know.’ were thrown our way twice.

‘How burdensome…’

I wasn’t the only person in the lounge; there were quite a few others. There were a few people that were obviously dressed like they were on vacation, but those that seemed to be Users kept glancing at me. The atmosphere felt a bit strange.

“…….Huh?”

At that moment, I heard a voice from behind.

I thought, ‘Of course, that’ll have nothing to do with me,’ but the protagonist of that voice (gah this is how it’s written in the original) made her way immediately in front of me with clacking steps.

“I’m right? The one who sold the Barnasiums…Do you remember me?”

“…….Yes?”

At first, I was taken aback by the fact that strangers were blocking my view, but gradually I began to feel that the woman in front of me was familiar.

Her bronzed skin, her sporty haircut, and the glimpses of the tattoos on her exposed shoulders. More decisively, her talk about the [Barnasiums].

“Uh, huh? Good morning…”

She was the last person to buy the [Barnasiums] I sold. Then, later, I ran into her alongside Bae Jaemin's party at the department store…

Not knowing what I should do, I offered her a clumsy smile and a greeting, but my insides burned with anxiety. I had a feeling that something was about to go wrong.

"What are you doing?" a man asked.

My premonition wasn't wrong.

While I greeted the woman, someone with green, cropped hair popped out from behind her and stared at me.

It was the man that began to release bloodthirst when Bae Jaemin had first shown interest in me… I made eye contact with the man who was confirmed as an executive member of HaHae on TV broadcast.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Whoops, this chapter came a bit later than I wanted >.<

Still! We're finally closing in on Park Hoseok!

Footnotes

1. = a bit more casual/vulgar/slang way to say upset
2. third largest airport in Korea! It's west of Seoul.

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I could not hide my flustered stance after suddenly running into two people affiliated with Bae Jaemin. Further, why did it have to be right when we're pursuing Park Hoseok? I was worried that the plan may be ruined by this meeting.

So, after our brief greetings, I shut my mouth and forced a laugh at the woman who recognized me. Please, I'm begging you, just leave me…

"Who……?" However, the green-haired man glanced at me before speaking to the woman in his group. Looking at his face, it was clear that he found me somewhat familiar, but he didn't seem to exactly remember my identity.

This was so bleak for someone like me who just wanted to pass through this unfortunate meeting by feigning ignorance. Of course, the woman who had no idea of my inner feelings, answered him with a smile, "A while ago– the one that spoke with our guildmaster…"

"With Jaemin-hyung?" The green-haired man who referred to Jaemin as a 'hyung' turned to me again; he seemed to be groping through his memories. After a brief moment, he exclaimed, "Ah!" before a slight frown adorned his face. Of course, when our eyes met again, he was expressionless.

Though his current expression was neutral, from his unfriendly attitude and wary eyes, I was convinced that the hostility I felt from him in the past was not an illusion.

‘Why on earth does this man hate me so much?’

I had no intention of being friendly with him either, but it’s not as if I’ve done anything to him yet. Seeing him hate me so much, I wondered if I’ve misstepped.

‘No way, it’s not possible, but… Does he know anything about my true colors?’

Wasn’t our ultimate goal Bae Jaemin’s downfall and death? If the person that appeared to be his closest confidant was wary of me, wouldn’t I fall under his suspicion for the following events?

So many things seemed to be going wrong, I became dispirited.

Suddenly, the green-haired man asked me, “Are you still in contact with Jaemin-hyung?”

“Huh? N-No…” I responded, reflexively shaking my head.

The green-haired man’s expressionless face instantaneously changed into a smiling face. Of course, he wasn’t pretending to be friendly… Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that his mood suddenly improved?

“Aha. Then, after receiving the business card at that time, you haven’t seen each other since then?” he asked.

“…Yes.”

Of course, there was that recent embarrassing encounter with Bae Jaemin in the VIP ward at the hospital, but there was no need to bring this matter up to the two of them.

After hearing my answer, the green-haired man’s face brightened; the woman with the sporty haircut, listening to our conversation nervously, finally gave a relieved smile as well. It seemed that both of them wanted me to have as little contact with Bae Jaemin as possible.

“Now that I think about it, hyung doesn’t suffer a big loss from not talking to you.”

The green-haired man definitely had an improved mood, but his hatred of me had not changed. It was exactly like he was trying to argue with me.

I didn’t want to reply to such childish comments from someone who appeared to be an adult; he must have judged that I had taken offense from the tightly shut mouth. With a happy chuckle on his lips, he turned towards me and spoke backhandedly, “I’m really sorry… This wasn’t why we ‘recognized’ you and came to talk to you.”

“Ah… Yes. Nothing’s wrong. It’s not your fault…” The woman who first approached me was the first to bow her head, embarrassed at the green-haired man’s attitude.

As soon as her companion moved away, her face turned red and she lowered her head. I shook my head, saying it was okay. In actuality, I wasn’t hurt by his arrogant attitude.

“He’s a bit sensitive regarding guildmaster Bae Jaemin’s matters. The two of them are close friends…’ [1]

“…….”

I wasn’t really curious about any of that, nor did their closeness excuse his rudeness. But, it was too burdensome to continue talking to her; I smiled to convey I roughly understood her feelings.

After seeing my expression, she released a short sigh of relief; she then glanced at her green-haired companion that had walked away by himself, “Umm…Let’s talk more when we meet again.”

“…If we meet again.”

Like that, the woman turned and walked away. I slumped back down in my seat.

I looked at the servants who had been quiet all this while; all three of them had focused their gazes on the green-haired that moved far enough to be a dot in the distance.

I sighed, trying to regain their attention, “Hey. I don’t really care about them…You can’t harass him, okay?”

“I like punks that look like that,” Jung Garam said.

“What?”

However, Jung Garam continued to frown as he stared at the green-haired man. Shocked by those words, I tried to recall the green-haired’s face.

Of course, he wasn’t unattractive, but… his hair color was a bit weird, wasn’t it? No, thinking about it a bit more, I guess he had good skin? Does he like homely looks?

However, Jung Garam soon corrected my misunderstanding with a shady smile, “It’s the best when I see those kinds of guys crying and begging for their lives.”

“Haah…”

That’s right.

I pressed down strongly on Jung Garam’s head, breaking his line of sight. Perhaps because he died so regretfully while at the peak of his teenage angstiness[2], he often said things like this. I had to disperse his focus.

“He’s like a squid guardian.” [3] This time, Kim Olim, who had been sitting solemnly, spoke. I was puzzled, unable to follow her line of thought, but Jung Garam, who began burrowing his face into my arms, just laughed and laughed.

“I wasn’t so sure last time, but I’ve got it now. He’s an Animist. Looking at his hair colour, he must be a wind or forest type specialist,” Seo Dawon said, identifying the green-haired guy’s class.

But, can you tell what class someone is just by their hair color? Well, that green color really was unusual; it was too exceptionally shiny to be a splatter dye job. I’ve heard that there are cases where a User’s class could change their appearance; it seems like this may be one such case…

Actually, I was more curious about the reason they came to Gimpo airport, more so than the green-haired’s class. After all, I wouldn’t want them to become an issue while we tried to capture Park Hoseok.

“No way…. Bae Jaemin isn’t going to come to Jeju Island too, right?” I asked.

“Bae Jaemin’s in Europe right now,” Kim Olim answered, immediately.

“Ooh…… Did Koo Hui-seo tell you that too?”

“No. I joined Bae Jaemin’s fan cafe.” [4] With that said, she dared to add that she signed up with my account. Of course, it was a natural thing to do in order to collect information, but…

“Don’t worry. It’s not a paid account.” [5] After looking at my ambiguous expression, she added those words. As if I would be concerned about that…

[Welcome passengers, XX Airline flight for Jeju will now start boarding.]

The long-awaited boarding announcement finally arrived; I gave up– swallowing the words I wanted to say.

* * *

After just an hour, our flight landed at Jeju International Airport. Not long after arriving at the airport, I received a call from an unfamiliar number.

“Hello?”

[Ah, have you arrived?]

“Koo Hui-seo-ssi?”

[Yes.]

Unexpectedly, it was Koo Hui-seo. I took the phone off my ear for a moment and looked at the screen–it was an unknown number and not a stored one. I wondered if he had changed his contact, but, first, I thanked him for making it easy for us to reach Jeju Island. “Thanks to you, we arrived well.”

[I’ve already looked into a place for you to stay. It’s a villa that Kyungman-ie used, so the house is very pretty and scenic.]

There was a lull in the conversation; Olim, who overheard the call, nodded her head. That meant that I could accept it. Was it something they arranged beforehand?

“Thank you so much. I didn’t know you’d take care of us like this…”

[It’s nothing. The chauffeur will contact you soon. Feel free to spend your time freely before arriving.]

I expressed my brief gratitude and hung up before Koo Hui-seo could continue with the useless niceties. Next to me, Jung Garam murmured, “It seems like he noticed his number’s blocked.”

After milling about at the exit, I noticed the striking green hair once again. He glanced my way with his sunglasses-covered eyes, but he soon turned away from me and walked off. His companion, sporty hair-cut, followed after him.

For some reason, my eyes followed them until I received a call from the chauffeur and exited the airport. When I saw the exotic landscape dotted with palm trees, I suddenly thought of Lackey, who I couldn't bring since we packed in such a hurry. Since Lackey was registered as a weapon for my class, I couldn't bring it on the flight.

'What a shame…'

If there were no major issues, the itinerary should be completed within two days, so we wouldn't be away for long. I had also asked Kim Sangyoon to stop by my lodgings once a day.

'Please, I hope things go as planned…'

TL: Koo Hui-seo trying his hardest pour some sugar on someone who already has supplied him with a lot of sugar. Similarly, I wonder how much certain classes in this world change you, both internally and externally.

Also! I reached 100 ratings on NovelUpdates! (Although the 100th rating was 1-star haha ^^;) But thanks for the ratings and reviews guys.

Footnotes

1. = abbreviation/slang for close friends or perhaps best friends.
2. 2 = Eighth Grader Syndrome–the edginess and childishness that comes with being a teenage
3. = A sacred animal or object that is said to guard a house, a village, or a space.
4. Fan cafes are online fan communities for celebrities. You'll often get news on what they're doing/where they're heading etc. Often Celebs interact with the high level members of the cafe as well
5. Paying members get higher 'levels' and are privy to more information and can access the celeb's private selfies etc

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Contrary to my worries, nothing happened on the way to the villa.

After driving on the well-paved roads, we arrived at an area that seemed like an expensive village, lined with beautiful houses. Near the end of that road, a three-story mansion with impressive open windows appeared before me.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I’ve received a call from the guildmaster regarding your arrival. I’m Kim Cheol-gyun, the representative of this villa’s maintenance enterprise.”

As soon as we dismounted in front of the mansion, ten people–were they contacted in advance?–were standing in a row. I awkwardly nodded; the man named Kim Cheol-gyun politely guided us to the villa without another word. After handing over a tablet PC and telling us to call him whenever we needed anything, he left for someplace else.

‘…He’s probably being considerate, allowing us to move as we please?’

The servants scattered and settled in; Jung Garam went straight up to the third floor and found Park Hoseok’s villa, which was quite near this mansion.

Honestly, it wasn’t close enough to see with the naked eye, but Jung Garam drew an ellipse on the window. The glass inside the line began to shine blue.

Soon enough, Park Hoseok's villa, which I recognized from the previous photos, appeared on the glass clearly. It was as if the window became the lens of a telescope. The road connecting to the entrance of the villa and the license plate of the parked car were clearly visible, so we could infer that Park Hseok was currently present at home.

"It seems that he's hung a security skill inside the window. I could probably break it down in about six hours…" the Assassin murmured.

Park Hoseok's presence couldn't be confirmed due to the security skills installed that forbade others from looking inside the villa.

However, after contemplating for a while, Seo Dawon shook his head, "There's no reason to expend energy early. We're going to kill him before he can return to the Seoul Hub anyway."

According to the information we obtained, Park Hoseok will return to the Seoul Hub the day after tomorrow, so we shouldn't waste our precious time looking inside the villa. Instead, we focused on identifying the location and environment outside of his vacation home.

"If the battle is carried out at Park Hoseok's villa, there's a high possibility that there will be noise complaints. In particular, there's a family of more than 7 that lives in that white-roofed mansion close by. Even a little disturbance could attract their attention."

"In addition, behind the villa there's also the Jeju City Hunter Management Office; dozens of Users go back and forth along that road daily. It may be a small distance away, but, if powerful spells are used, it may draw their notice."

However, since the location was situated in such a wealthy residential area, overpowering Park Hoseok in the villa would prove to be a problem due to the prevalence of security facilities or neighbors nearby. As both Jung Garam and Park Hoseok are close in combat ability, the conflict is likely to be back and forth. They would easily be noticed if the house were to break or if Park Hoseok runs outside to ask for help.

However, Jung Garam soon opened the map and found a suitable place to lure Park Hoseok, “Here–a road that runs along this coastal cliff. If we lure him here at night, I don’t think we’d need to worry about witnesses.”

Famous tourist attractions along that road were closed at 6 pm, so there was bound to be less traffic. In addition, it’s hard to identify us in the dark of the night; even if Park Hoseok wanted to turn and run away, his back was to the cliff.

After deciding on the location, we decided to find a way to call out our target. Of course, news regarding Koo Kyungman would be the perfect bait.

It was obvious, seeing how close the two were–how Koo Kyungman helped to develop the spearman–that the two had intimate, dirty knowledge of each other.

If Koo Kyungman is alive and is caught on suspicion of murder, the ensuing investigation may uncover other criminal charges. Someone with Park Hoseok’s personality would constantly worry about loose ends. In such a situation, if Koo Kyungman were to contact him, the spearman would be unable to sleep without checking it out.

“But, if we contacted him pretending to be Koo Kyungman without any evidence to back that up, I feel like he’d just ignore it. After all, he’s such a cautious person.”

“Let’s search for something we could use around here. They built this villa to be close to each other, and they met up often.”

So, we began to search Koo Kyungman’s villa indiscriminately. At first, I looked passively through desk drawers and cabinets, but, when I saw Seo Dawon kick over the study’s desk and open the wood floor below, I eventually began to search thoroughly–to the extent that I may be accused of dismantling the mansion.

Kim Olim mercilessly cut down the decorational ornaments; Jung Garam used his skills to check the gardens outside the mansion. I took charge of the dressing room and attempted to find something suspicious, but

ended up looking at Koo Kyungman's several million won watches to my heart's content.

"There was a safe, but nothing useful in it."

"It seems he really came to Jeju island for vacation. There's nothing special…except that most of the art here are imitations."

"The garden's also clean."

Like that, after investigating the insides and outsides of the mansion for two hours, we gathered in the third-floor living room again.

I also raised my hands, "I found out nothing except that Koo Kyungman is dirty rich."

At the very least, Kim Olim had found a picture–Koo Kyungman and Park Hoseok fishing on a yacht–in a study on the first floor, but there was no conclusive evidence on those two's relationship.

However, since we didn't have much time, we decided to write down a time and location behind that picture, and, along with the expensive brand name watch that Koo Kyungman liked to wear, packaged them to be sent to Park Hoseok.

Everything was feasible until this point. The problem now, however, was sending these things to the spearman without going through a middleman.

Every villa in this luxury village, including the one we're using, had guards standing at the entrance. The same was true of Park Hoseok's villa. Even if we left this package at the entrance, the security detail would find it first, and its contents would be exposed to others. If Park Hoseok was found missing or his corpse was discovered, there was sure to be some guard's testimony on the suspicious box and the picture containing the specified location and time.

However, while we were searching for another method since sneaking and entering Park Hoseok's villa seemed too difficult at the moment, Jung

Garam suddenly raised his head and looked out the window. “Oh, it looks like we won’t have to think about that?”

“What?” Following the Assassin and looking out the window, I could see Park Hoseok exiting the main gate and entering a luxury sedan. He left the villa in a chauffeur-driven car; perhaps he had an appointment?

We exchanged glances and immediately ran down to the first floor.

It was time to shadow him.

* * *

We contacted Koo Hui-seo shortly afterwards, and he immediately sent us a driver. He was a large, bulky man who looked more like a gangster than a chauffeur, but he didn’t engage in unnecessary conversation. Furthermore, instead of a luxury sedan, he pulled up in an ordinary car.

It was a common car that would be unnoticeable in a crowd except for the deep tints on its windows. Though it took about 15 minutes, we were able to catch up with Park Hoseok without much difficulty, thanks to Jung Garam’s tracking skills.

Park Hoseok passed over the road to the downtown and entered a coastal path; after another 30 minutes, he got off in front of what seemed to be a cafe. The driver escorted Park Hoseok in and then disappeared–perhaps to go and park the car?

I searched the name of the cafe and found that it was a luxury restaurant that only accepted reservations. “What should we do? Should we just go in?”

“No, look there.” Kim Olim suddenly pointed in a direction. I followed her hand with my eyes and found Park Hoseok approaching some people.

The people that Park Hoseok greeted so happily…was none other than miss sporty haircut and Mr. green hair that we encountered at the airport today. Surprised, I reflexively hid my head. “Did they just meet up simply for a meal?”

“It seems like it, judging from their expressions. That restaurant doesn’t have the structure to support sensitive conversations either.”

Though the three looked like dots on the horizon for me, Kim Olim answered as if she could clearly see their faces. Blinking, I stared at Seo Dawon. I wondered if we really needed to sit here and wait until they finished their meal.

Then, watching them slowly disappear into the restaurant, Seo Dawon asked me to get out of the car.

“Are we going in?”

“No. We should go to the parking lot.”

He said it’d be nice to leave a surprise gift in the car.

It was only then I realized why we kept waiting, and hurriedly pressed my hat deeply over my head; I held the box containing our invitation snug in my arms.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: If I were Lee-kyung-ie, I’d be stealing so many of those watches and things to sell.

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Chapter 145

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We quickly found the car that drove Park Hoseok here in a nearby parking lot. The chauffeur was standing not too far away in what seemed to be the smoking section.

Calling on a cellphone with one hand and holding a cigarette in the other, the chauffeur stood with his back to the car, so we could easily access it.

“What about the black box?” [1]

“I’ve already taken care of it.”

Jung Garam’s eyes glimmered blue for a brief moment and then grew dim again; the light, which had been blinking regularly from behind the car’s glass, flickered off. We heard a small clicking sound–it seemed that Jung Garam unlocked the car door.

Lowering my head, I approached the car, estimated where it was likely for Park Hoseok to sit, and placed the box in the back seat before closing the door. I turned to look at the chauffeur just in case, but he was still busy on the phone.

“Have you finished your business?” our driver asked.

“Yes, yes…”

Soon afterwards, we returned to our own car, and the rough-looking chauffeur quickly took us back to Koo Kyungman’s villa again.

‘Haah……’ I was unable to calm my beating heart until we arrived back at the villa. However, even after the initial nervousness subsided, constant insecure anxiety washed over me. “So, about the box… What if he doesn’t open it because it’s too suspicious…or What if he asks someone else to open it for him?”

“Don’t worry. I left something that’d draw Park Hoseok’s attention the moment he enters the car.” Jung Garam smiled leisurely, as if he expected such a question, and winked at me. He moved his finger, just like when he drew the ellipse on the window earlier.

That must mean that he left something on the car’s window.

In addition, Seo Dawon confidently said, “I also applied a little ‘suggestion’ that’ll trigger the moment Park Hoseok sees the box; the probability that it’ll fall into another person’s hand is small.”

Reassured, I raided the full refrigerator, prepared some decent instant food, and headed to the coastal cliff.

The appointed place indicated in our gift was a scenic photo spot located a little ways away from the road–a triangular spot created by wooden deck and iron supports left quietly unattended. Perhaps people stopped walking over here when the road was built and it became difficult to access the sidewalk.

However, we couldn’t let our guard down; we began some simple preparations to allow this reunion with Park Hoseok to proceed without interruption.

Jung Garam began to engrave unknown skills onto the deck, and Seo Dawon broke several branches of the greenery planted nearby and dropped them at the entrance. Kim Olim jumped down the cliff and came up shortly afterwards, saying “There’s gaps where people can pass by below, but we’ll soon be isolated due to the rising tide.”

As for my role…

“Choi Lee-kyung! Do you see the branches at the entrance? Go past that and look this way.”

I was to check whether the boundary limitations set by Seo Daown and Jung Garam were fully activated.

I crossed the line and turned around as Jung Garam asked, looking back at the appointed site. Truly, I could only see thick trees laden with leaves and the coastal cliff beyond.

However, I knew of their existence, so I slowly approached the cliff. It looked as if I’d walk into a free-fall if I took another step, but I thought my foot would touch something.

So, without hesitation, I stepped over, crossing the fence…

“…..Uagh!”

“What are you doing?”

Before I could cross completely, Seo Dawon seized my arm from behind.

“I mean, you guys told me to check it…” I answered evasively, feeling awkward.

Seo Dawon, still holding me by the arms, dropped me behind the fence. “Spatial distortion isn’t about hiding or masking space, but rather distorting it. If you fell here, you’d actually plunge downwards.”

“What? Gasp…” Shocked, I fell off the fence and stumbled again while stepping backwards, but, since Seo Dawon was still holding onto me, I didn’t fall down.

However, I couldn’t avoid backing myself into his chest. Seo Dawon sighed quietly, and that soft sound vividly embedded itself into my ears.

Since the dregs of yesterday’s resentment had not yet been washed away, I felt abashed at receiving help for something so dumb. I felt more

embarrassed than usual after hearing that sigh.

So, I quickly tried to separate myself from him, but, instead, Seo Dawon drew me closer. Then, lowering his voice, he whispered, “You just really recklessly rush into things when you don’t know things, huh? Bravery born of ignorance, or something like that?”

However, his words were so sarcastic compared to the warmth of his embrace. Furthermore, the nuance of his words seemed to refer to more than my almost-tumble off of the cliff earlier. I immediately turned my head to glare at him.

Seo Dawon calmly shrugged his shoulders, despite my piercing gaze, “If you don’t want me to nag at you, consider how precious your life is. Don’t jump down recklessly or donate blood.”

“If you don’t want me to act foolishly because of my ignorance, then explain things to me properly.”

“Don’t want to. Things won’t change just because you know about it.”

Then, honestly, what do you want from me? You keep on treating me like a fool because of this ‘great secret!’ However, before I could raise my voice in earnest, Seo Dawon interrupted my thoughts, “Rather, it’s more relieving if you would stop trying to save me…”

“What?”

“Because you like me too much.”

“What on earth…”

While speaking, Seo Dawon squinted as if he were looking at something that could potentially bring him heartfelt despair. It’s like he firmly believed that if I were to know the whole story, I would turn my eyes away from him–from this weird delusion that I would do absolutely anything for him.

I mean, he’s not even me–how could he think of me so shamelessly? One might think I’ve been the aggressor in this situation, chasing after him for months!

“Seo Dawon, you seem to be misunderstanding something…I just…I only just slightly am fond of your face, okay??” My cheeks flushed, heat pooling as if I’m having a fever, but I couldn’t pass this by without protesting. Just what does that bastard think of me? I drew a line in the sand, demanding that he let go of this misunderstanding.

“Is that so?”

“Yeah! It’s not like I can’t live without you…please remember that!”

“Then that’s a relief.”

Why did I feel so dirty when I saw him obediently nod his head?

Is my affection for him so bothersome? Fucker… I didn’t even want to confess to you! I didn’t even do anything, and you’re the one who went and noticed it first–you’re the one who made our relationship so restless… You’re the one who kissed me first!

However, Seo Dawon suddenly grabbed my chin and lifted it up. Then, looking at my frowning face, he smiled, “Then, why do you oscillate between joy and sorrow from my words, hm?”

“I never…”

“What do you mean, never. Even now, I can clearly see that you’re thinking inside, ‘Do you hate me so much?'”

I was thinking that I wanted to bite my tongue.

And, Seo Dawon didn’t miss the momentary shame that crossed my face.

I knew that my emotions shined out of my eyes, but I couldn’t use my hands to cover them up. I didn’t want to be dragged around like this…. But because the Mage always looked at me as if he were observing something

so cute…Because this time, it didn't seem like a carefully constructed facade…I really wanted to take a mirror and show him his own expression at this moment.

"The…nerve of you… You're the one that's too interested in me…"

"That's what I thought, but who's the one who slashed his own palm with a blade."

What could my actions back then possibly mean to Seo Dawon?

In reality, I was thinking quite simply. Of course, it's not like I felt some innate repulsion at what I did. It's just that, Seo Dawon…did so many strange things to his own body and mine for fear of ripping me apart. I just felt sorry for his lonely struggles. Rather than being motivated through pure affection…I was motivated more through humanistic compassion.

"That's just…There was no special meaning to that…"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. It had nothing to do with whether or not I like you…"

Seo Dawon, smiling, stopped me from explaining myself further, "That's even worse, Lee-kyung-ah."

Before I could ask what he meant, Kim Olim appeared from behind the fence. Still holding onto my now frightened self, Seo Dawon returned to his expressionless baseline.

"Jung Garam said that Park Hoseok returned to his villa. We should slowly get into our places" she said.

"Alright"

"……Yeah."

And Seo Dawon, slowly, released my arm that he had been holding until then.

TL: The way Seo Dawon is speaking is making me nervous lmao, it’s like he’s preparing Lee-kyung-ie for his death or disappearance, pushing him away and worrying the Lee-kyung is doing too much for him. Arghhh I wanna know what the system has been saying to him.

Footnotes

1. A black box is an electronic recording device placed in an aircraft or other vehicles for the purpose of facilitating the investigation of aviation accidents and incidents.

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Chapter 146

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After finishing up the preparations, we returned to Koo Kyungman's villa in order to keep track of Park Hoseok's behavior. The appointed time to meet was set at 11pm–the perfect time to act out of public sight.

A problem, however, would occur if Park Hoseok spent the rest of the downtime to make a rational judgement and inform the police or the Hunter Association, not falling into the trap we dug.

Fortunately, no remarkable movement was detected and, about an hour before the appointed time, all lights at Park Hoseok's villa went out. Silence reigned over his property.

And, with about 30 minutes left on the clock until 11 pm, Park Hoseok finally appeared outside his mansion.

He wore a deep hat in order to hide his face as much as possible; he left the villa through the side door used by gardeners rather than the front gate. After walking away for 10 minutes, he called a taxi and moved to an area near the meeting place.

We secretly followed him. He disembarked the car at the entrance to a road a little ways away from the appointed place; after hesitating for a moment, he started determinedly walking along the cliff, as if he had resolved something within his mind. After a short while, he walked to the photo spot we had prepped in advance.

After watching Park Hoseok enter the spatially distorted space, I followed. Since I deliberately made noisy steps, he quickly turned around, sensing the presence of another human being. “You…”

“……”

“I know you. Yeah, we’ve met before, right? You sold Barnasiums or something.”

Surprisingly, Park Hoseok remembered me. He made quite the impression on me as someone that was part of Bae Jaemin’s entourage, alongside his striking scar on his face, but he hadn’t seen me since our first meeting. I was a little startled by his unexpected and extraordinary memory.

Park Hoseok examined my nervous face with a piercing look. Perhaps he found me a lacking opponent, without hiding his laughter, he asked incredulously, “No way, was this ridiculous invitation yours?”

“……That’s right,” I said.

“Really? Then how much do you know for you to go this far?”

“……”

“No, that’s not right. Someone of your level wouldn’t try to engage me alone…Who’s pulling your strings.”

However, I wasn’t interested in Park Hoseok’s interrogation; it didn’t matter that he was looking down on me. Right at this moment, right when he started focusing his attention straight at me, I…I was so busy clenching my fingernails into my palms to stop myself from bursting into laughter.

The moment his eyes locked with mine, memories that weren’t my own flooded my brain rapidly. The blue block [1] that was so vivid at the moment of *his* collapse, the disgusting smell of roasting flesh, and the metallic taste of blood filling my throat penetrated my head.

I steeled myself so as to not stumble, and, while staring straight at Park Hoseok, opened my mouth. “[Jung Garam].”

“Huh?”

“Jung Garam was the one to invite you.”

Amusingly, Park Hoseok did not have an immediate reaction to the Assassin’s name. Jung Garam’s memories…the death I had experienced personally… That man, after killing someone with his own two hands, had forgotten about it afterwards.

No, rather, because Jung Garam died, he must have had the privilege to erase all that from his memory. Because the assassin died–because not even his corpse was left behind… Enjoying the victory snatched through wickedness…he arrogantly believed that it was all over.

“Jung Garam……?” Of course, even if it were a bit late, Park Hoseok eventually recalled the owner of that name. And then, he looked at me in shock. “You… What do you know?”

“…….”

“I asked you just how much you know! Answer me!” He began emitting an incomparably powerful bloodthirst. He threw away his facade of tacit relaxation.

When I didn’t answer, Park Hoseok took one step forward. He seemed willing, one way or another, to extract what he wanted to hear from my mouth.

However…

“Just why are you yelling at our Lee-kyung-ie, hm?”

Behind him, Jung Garam appeared, back facing the rays of moonlight. Park Hoseok turned around, startled by the unfamiliar voice. When Jung Garam’s eyes met Park Hoseok’s, the Assassin smiled, his red eyes in the shape of a half-moon.

Then, raising his white hand and waving gently, he asked, “It’s been a long while, how’ve you been?”

* * *

It felt as if the spatial illusion was placed on hold for a brief moment. Park Hoseok stared at Jung Garam with wide-open eyes, as if he had forgotten to breathe. Across him, Jung Garam lightly jumped to the ground from atop a hideous triangular iron sculpture.

“Hmm……” After landing calmly on the ground–without even the slightest bit of noise–Jung Garam murmured mysteriously as he examined the shadows created beneath his hands and feet.

And, after hearing that sound, Park Hoseok stepped back, hands trembling. He was so shocked to the extent that he was unable to speak.

“What? I haven’t even started yet, but you already seem so sick of me.” Jung Garam mocked him relentlessly.

Park Hoseok could only observe Jung Garam’s appearance, unable to retort despite his sarcastic remarks. He spoke, the expression on his face desperately hoping that the reality unfolding before him was simply a dream, “D-don’t make me laugh…I…d-definitely…”

“Are you going to keep saying half-witted things like that?” Jung Garam summoned a dagger in his hand and yawned, as if he were bored.

The dagger–blade curved with a sharp edge akin to that of a scorpion’s tail–began to flash eerily under the moonlight.

Only after seeing the weapon did Park Hoseok escape from his desperate denial of reality and hurriedly manifested [Gae Bolg]. “Impossible. I confirmed you were dead…”

However, even when [Gae Bolg] was brought out, Park Hoseok maintained a confused expression that spoke to how numb his mind was. Jung Garam cut off his stutters, looking bored, and said, “You should have been more thorough.”

“……”

“Anyway, are we going to do a 1 on 1 for real this time? Can you even do well without Bae Jaemin?” With a slippery smile, Jung Garam switched his hold to a reverse grab and leaned forward like a sprinter at the starting line. After seeing Jung Garam’s showy change in posture, he hurriedly held up [Gae Bolg] at an angle and took a defensive stance.

However, his attempts were futile. In the blink of an eye, Jung Garam disappeared; soon afterwards, Park Hoseok’s scream echoed through the night sky. Jung Garam, who had instantaneously moved behind Park Hoseok, had struck the spearman’s ear with the dagger. He had even ripped off the dangling, barely attached ear with his bare hands.

“Arghhhh!”

“Stop exaggerating,” Jung Garam said.

Park Hoseok, screaming, covered his right ear with his right hand. Though he tried to place pressure, blood from the torn ear spurted out through the crevices of his hand.

Jung Garam picked up the torn ear and, after fiddling with it for a while, threw it to the ground like trash. Park Hoseok’s eyes were red and bloodshot. “Fuck, fucker…gasp, gasp… I’m going to kill this bastard!”

“We haven’t started yet, and you’re already in tears?”

“You crazy bastard!”

Overcome by Jung Garam’s taunts, Park Hoseok threw the [Gae Bolg] at a great speed with his left hand. The spear, which resembled a flying wedge at its great speed, flew crookedly at Jung Garam’s waist, but Jung Garam

avoided it and rushed into Park Hoseok's empty-handed vicinity. At that speed, Jung Garam could have plunged the dagger right into his heart, but instead he slashed at one side of his chest.

"Ugh, Arghhh!"

After hearing Park Hoseok's desperate, long scream, [Gae Bolg], after missing its target, returned to its owner's hand. Jung Garam neatly slipped away from the spearman. "You should have practiced throwing that spear during the time you were living the good life." [2]

"Urghhh…hngh…."

Park Hoseok was a man with an impressive body; he stood out as someone who had worked as a bodyguard. His upper body was quite developed–probably from his choice of weapon. But, Jung Garam had cut at his chest and ripped away some muscles while jabbering at him.

It seemed that he received double the mental damage–Park Hoseok was trembling, holding his chest together while being attacked from both sides. Completely cornered, he looked down at his blood-soaked hands, suddenly threw [Gae Bolg] aside, and knelt down on the floor.

"What are you doing?" Jung Garam asked.

"P-Please…! Spare my life."

"Hah?"

"I…I just…did as I was ordered. It's the truth…"

Jung Garam, as if he had lost all excitement, looked at Park Hoseok's lowered head with a cold expression. Of course, Park Hoseok hadn't seen the change in expression; begs and prayers tumbled out of Park Hoseok's mouth. Adopting an ambiguous expression, as if he were thinking about something else, Jung Garam approached his prone body.

“Any…Anything, I’ll give you anything. I’ll tell you everything I know, so please…”

“Anything?”

“Y-Yes!”

“Then, what about your family?”

At that moment, as if he had malfunctioned, Park Hoseok became rigid. Jung Garam continued indifferently, as if he were provoking an ant with the tips of his shoes, “Nah. After killing you, I want to kill your wife and your children. In any case, they have to pay for the sins of their father, right?” [3]

“…….”

“Don’t like that?”

Park Hoseok, still lying down, slowly raised his head. His desperate expression was begging for something, anything; Jung Garam, looking down at him, seemed supremely satisfied. While patting Park Hoseok’s head with a dagger, Jung Garam continued to speak, “Actually, I’m not fond of that idea either. But if you give up so easily, just where am I supposed to vent my anger?”

“……”

“So, don’t give up, take heart, and struggle hard.”

“……”

“Until your whole body is in shambles.”

TL: Silent vigil for Park Hoseok–he’s in over his head.

Footnotes

1. Remember, Jung Garam died on a blue tile
2. The original said –sucking breastmilk. Literally, living the good and easy life with everything handed to him.
3. Originally–you have to pay for meeting the wrong father

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Chapter 147

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His life was smooth sailing until he found a suspicious box in his car.

By seizing an unprecedented once-in-a-lifetime fortune, he gained wealth and power he couldn’t have imagined before; Koo Kyungman, the one who held his weakness, was being chased as a suspect in a homicide. If Koo Kyungman were to disappear like this or was found dead, the man would be able to cut off his ties with his dirty past and start, without pause, a new life.

Furthermore, he received a call today from Bae Jaemin, someone he worked so hard for. The words conveyed through Bae Jaemin’s closest aides were clearly intended to appease him.

Probably, Bae Jaemin wanted secret information on the Red Dragon guild that only the man would have. If Koo Kyungman were alive, they wouldn’t have been able to meet boldly, but, now that Koo Kyungman was in trouble, this was an opportunity for both the man and Bae Jaemin.

The man was well aware of that, so he tried not to seem despicable to Bae Jaemin even when he joined the [HaHae] guild and served as a spy. He had hinted that he was acting against his will.

Bae Jaemin had received that signal, and made the man a double spy, deliberately providing him information that could be passed onto Koo Kyungman. The opportunity to reap the fruit of his endeavors had come into the light today.

‘Now that you’ve shaken it all off, you should do as you please.’

‘He’s the one that knows your origins, right?’

‘Should such a capable person get caught up in such a trivial matter?’

‘…..’

‘Besides, don’t you know? We’re already in the same boat.’

Specific conditions were not mentioned–and the man did not speak recklessly–but the tacit consultation could be considered over. There were issues that still concerned him, but the Bae Jaemin the man knew would definitely be able to resolve such a minor problem.

Still, the man spared his words in order to raise his price. Of course, he only unmasked his smile in the car where no other eyes were around.

However, the man’s happy mood disappeared as soon as he turned his head to look at the seat next to him.

How could a dirty delivery box that looked as if it were used several times find its way to the seat next to him? Goosebumps raised all over his arms, how could he not notice such an unfitting object casually invading his personal space and touching his thigh.

The man felt an unusually disturbing aura from the box, and, almost involuntarily, he muttered, “What’s this?”

“Yes?”

“This box. What is it?”

“I-I’m so sorry, sir. I don’t know what you’re talking about…….”

The man raised the box up to the chauffeur, but the chauffeur’s gaze continued to wander the empty air and did not see the box placed in the

man’s hand.

The chauffeur was an ordinary person–not a User. It was then that the man realized that the box was a message directed to him. Normally, he wouldn’t have opened the box and would have discussed its existence with the head of his security department, but the man could not withstand the curiosity that grew within him and instantaneously removed the loosely attached tape.

Then, he found a picture where the faces were cut off. It would’ve been difficult for anyone else to recognize who the two men in the photo were, but the man could easily recognize them.

The box had even contained the same model of watch worn on the wrist of one of the men in that photo. A time and place–to meet?–were written in neat handwriting on the back of the photo. Anyone could see it for what it was: an obvious threat.

‘Koo Kyungman? No, if it were Koo Kyungman, he would’ve contacted me earlier… Besides, he’s not the type to use this sort of method to contact others…’

Actually, what tugged at the man’s concern the most was that Koo Kyungman didn’t even call him even though the former leader of the Red Dragon was being suspected for murder. As soon as he heard that Koo Kyungman became a prime suspect, the man was terrified that he would be ordered to enter jail for Koo Kyungman.

However, Koo Kyungman was still reported to be missing, and, seeing how Koo Hui-seo naturally occupied the position of guild master, he thought that Koo Kyungman had disappeared through Koo Hui-seo’s machinations…

For a man who was becoming increasingly confident in his idyllic stability, this threat was undoubtedly fatal. He had to figure out what the mystery opponent wanted and just how much he knew, but there was no way to find those out immediately.

The man arrived at his mansion and struggled until there were 30 minutes left before the threatened appointed time. He had the option to ask Bae Jaemin for help, but the man wanted to avoid being in debt without resolving specific matters in the previous conversation.

After all, perhaps the sender may be from the tabloids–maybe Koo Hui-seo had tipped them off. Or, the information contained within may have originated from the small-time private moneylenders under Koo Kyungman's control.

The man, while grinding his teeth, had even calculated how much information he would reveal depending on his predictions of his opponent's current knowledge. So–even then, even at that disadvantage–the man set off to negotiate.

"Jung Garam."

However, the blackmailer he met at the appointed location was a completely unexpected person. The person was someone Bae Jaemin had shown a peculiar, singular interest in, so he had remembered his face, but the man couldn't remember the other's name.

The man was embarrassed to have no information on his opponent; perhaps, that was when he felt that something strange was afoot.

But, when a most deadly name–the man's deepest held secret–dropped out of that person's mouth…the man decided that he must kill this person, no matter what.

Of course, that was what he thought before facing Jung Garam, back from the dead.

* * *

'Impossible…'

The man had personally killed Jung Garam. He was the one who took care of his corpse! He had never even encountered the young Assassin in a nightmare after murdering him. From that day on, those that knew of the [Red Lotus] and Jung Garam had simply mocked them. The same was true of the man.

“It’s been a long while, how’ve you been?”

However, after a few sarcastic customary greetings, the ensuing attacks blew away any of his doubts.

After killing Jung Garam at the [Tower of Command], the man thought that the Red Lotus guild members were nothing compared to what he expected from their public reputations.

Of course, the man and his collaborators had messed with the potions the [Red Lotus] members took, had laid a trap for them, raided them when they were extremely tired, and overpowered them with numerical advantage, but it still took only about an hour to exterminate the [Red Lotus] guild. In particular, the man held feelings of contempt for Jung Garam–his direct kill.

‘I can’t see…’

However, when his ear was torn and one side of his chest was carved out, the man knew deeply how he had been mistaken. Not only Jung Garam’s attacks but also his movements…the man realized that an insurmountable gap existed between them.

He stood and attempted to attack, but that went crooked quickly; Jung Garam stepped towards him at a tremendous speed, though his feet made no noise at all. Moreover, after being attacked, having his flesh ripped and feeling the ensuing pain…he knew what the Assassin was aiming for.

‘Damn, Not like this……! Bae Jaemin… Or, maybe Jisoo-nim…I can’t deal with him alone.’

So the man begged for his life in order to leave this situation alive. His pride or his broken body could be a problem left for later. While thinking

that, the man knelt servilely.

Furthermore, he was confident that Jung Garam wouldn't be able to ignore his pleading. He still had some use–would Jung Garam end his revenge after killing him only? There were at least ten users–ten giant players with large stakes in this business–involved in the betrayal, and the Assassin wouldn't be able to call all of them out in this way. For the time being, he could use the man to lure the others.

In that case, he could find the time to trigger something to make an emergency call. There was a special signal that Jung Garam didn't know about–when it was activated, all people involved in the [Red Lotus] annihilation would be summoned.

No matter how strong and competent Jung Garam was, he would not be able to stop them all. So, all he had to do was to buy time to trigger the emergency call…

"Actually, I'm not fond of that idea either. But if you give up so easily, just where am I supposed to vent my anger?"

"……"

"So, don't give up, take heart, and struggle hard."

"……"

"Until your whole body is in shambles."

When the man saw Jung Garam's cold gaze, he realized he had made a huge mistake; the Assassin never had the intention to use the man in the first place.

No matter what the man promised, Jung Garam would never give up. Because he only desired the man's tragic death; the only way out was to kill Jung Garam.

TL: Sorry guys, I don’t know what happened or why it didn’t upload! Either way, Here it is again!

Also I like how in Lee-kyung’s perspective, Jung Garam’s name is written with brackets bc he used his “skill” there to summon the Assassin. Park Hoseok doesn’t know that, so it’s not shown.

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Chapter 148

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However, there was nothing to narrow the gap between Jung Garam and the man.

No one knew that better than the man. When he had attacked Jung Garam in the [Tower Of Command], he was able to gain the upper hand because of not only [Gae Bolg], but support from Bae Jaemin as well; the man originally had no talent as a hunter. He had even fallen into depression because he had been so maladjusted when he first became a User.

Moreover, after [Red Lotus] disappeared, the man was too busy flattering Koo Kyungman and being a double agent for Bae Jaemin, so he had no time to improve.

Nevertheless, the time for him to take a hold of [Gae Bolg] had arrived. Reluctantly, while pretending to surrender, the man reached out once again to [Gae Bolg] that he had cast onto the ground earlier.

Normally, in this situation, if an enemy tried to grab his weapon once more, one would try to block that attempt or knock the weapon far away… However, what Jung Garam desired was an adrenaline filled fight with the man; so he didn't hinder the man's attempt to re-equip [Gae Bolg]. The man had predicted all of this.

'I'll make you regret how at ease you are…' The man thought to himself, hands trembling as he lifted [Gae Bolg] into the air. After all, Jung Garam needed to continue to underestimate him as a miserable, poor opponent.

With that, the man slightly turned a ring equipped on his right thumb finger, activating a [Temporary Recovery] skill attached to the accessory.

[Temporary Recovery] alone would not restore the parts of his body that had been cut out, but the open wounds gradually stopped bleeding and the pain that caused him to clench his teeth slowly subsided. The man had bought these accessories because he had not fully believed in Koo Kyungman and was expecting a different sort of confrontation.

“Whew….” After regaining some composure, the man settled his grasp on the spear. He gently tilted his hips back, resulting in a subtle but efficient posture that would enable him to throw [Gae Bolg] at any moment.

“Hmmm.” Jung Garam, who looked like he was gazing at a sheep with his flashy eyes, suddenly jumped away and widened the distance between them. It was as if the two were fighting in a boxing ring–the young Assassin would give the other a chance and would not touch his opponent until he was ready.

Within Jung Garam’s confidence, the man perceived the other’s absolute confidence–the Assassin knew that the spear couldn’t even graze him–but the man clenched his teeth and activated [Gae Bolg]’s first skill: [Javelin].

Shwisshhh–!

[Gae Bolg] immediately flew in a parabola shape, cutting through the air at a frightening speed; with the force of gravity, the spear began to plummet atop Jung Garam’s head.

However, he did not hear the expected resounding scream. Jung Garam had lightly caught [Gae Bolg], as if he were catching a sorghum cracker. He had not even been pushed back from his position.

Without much excitement, Jung Garam looked down at [Gae Bolg], looked towards the startled man, and asked sarcastically, “Want me to teach you how to throw it properly?”

He then gripped the spear handle between two fingers, like he was handling an iron hook, and threw it gently–bottoms up–as if he were playing with a ball.

Jung Garam had an elegant stance, but the power contained within his throw was ferocious and harsh. If [Gae Bolg] were an ordinary item, the man would probably have lost his life with this singular throw.

However, [Gae Bolg] was a divine item; these devices had systematic safety measures to stop them from harming their owner’s body. Therefore, [Gae Bolg] stopped right in front of the man’s nose, vibrated loudly, before losing all strength and momentum, falling and rolling on the ground.

“……”

The man paled and froze, looking at [Gae Bolg] which sounded very much like a tin can clattering as it rolled across the ground. He also discovered that the spear was damaged–squished–where Jung Garam had held it.

“Pick it up.”

“……” The man took [Gae Bolg] back in hand. As he did so, a system message manifested before him: the item could possibly be completely destroyed if used at this intensity once more without repairing it first.

He realized that Jung Garam could have destroyed it completely in his first throw, but he just chose not to. Jung Garam intended to not only destroy the man but his spear as well.

‘Crazy bastard…’ The frightened man began to launch a series of flashy attacks to distract Jung Garam and modified his plan to search for an escape route.

No matter what attacks he made, he had no confidence that those actions would cloud Jung Garam's judgement. He still had [Listrad], [Gae Bolg]'s top skill, but he wasn't confident that [Listrad] would subdue Jung Garam.

Gradually becoming impatient, the man looked here and there, trying to find an opening. Even though Jung Garam was standing still, the Assassin's aura made it so that not a single viable gap was visible.

"Didn't you have an exciting skill before?" Jung Garam asked.

"……"

"Are you going to keep being no-fun like this?"

The man was unable to budge one inch despite the blatant taunt.

Clack–

Right then, the man could hear a very faint noise from behind–a very soft footstep. At that moment, the man realized once again that he and Jung Garam were not the only ones present.

"Where are you looking?"

"[Listrad]!" With that realization, the man sent a final blow towards Jung Garam's companion and not the young Assassin.

He did so instinctively; the man thought it would be better to kill the companion rather than to retreat while firing useless attacks at Jung Garam. Of course, there was a high chance that he would die first at Jung Garam's hand before the companion died…

'……Huh?'

However, the results far exceeded the man's expectations. Jung Garam ran towards him at tremendous speed, but he just passed by without attacking the man. [Gae Bolg] was aimed directly at the heart of the man behind him; Garam, who had barely flown to his companion's position, blocked the spear with his bare body.

Originally, [Gae Bolg] would pass through obstacles to hit only the target, but it seemed now that its [blink] ability had been disabled because of its severe durability depletion.

Nevertheless, [Gae Bolg] did its job wonderfully. As soon as Jung Garam judged he moved one step too late, instead of reaching out one hand, he stepped directly in front of the target. [Gae Bolg] directly hit Jung Garam's chest–right in front of his heart.

[Gae Bolg] had the added ability to split as soon as it penetrated its target, damaging their organs. As soon as Jung Garam was pierced by the spear, he fell to his knees, trembling as if he had suffered a grave blow.

"Garam-ah!" The Assassin's companion who stood behind him screamed.

Watching that scene, the man almost shed tears of overwhelming joy. Though the message [Gae Bolg has been completely destroyed] appeared, nothing could dampen the man's excitement. The joy of winning over Jung Garam once again and saving his own life had filled the man's head. "Hahaha! Crazy bastard! I won! I did it again!"

"Garam…"

Of course, the man wasn't simply drunk on his own victory. He had eventually succeeded in overpowering Jung Garam with his wit, but this incident had frightened him in various ways. He had to catch Jung Garam's companion and learn the truth at all costs.

The names of some torture experts ran through the man's head; he also recalled that Bae Jaemin had showed extraordinary interest in this guy.

'I guess I can just leave him like this…'

He had witnessed Bae Jaemin's cruelty several times–handing this guy over to him would probably yield satisfactory results. Plus, with this, the man could earn extra points with the Priest. After some mental calculations,

the man decided he had no need to use violence against Jung Garam's companion.

However, seeing Jung Garam's body stretched out underfoot, he couldn't hold in his anger, so he raised his foot–showy, as if he were performing for the Assassin's companion–and stepped on Jung Garam's white hand.

Rather, he was going to step on it, but……

Just before his foot touched Jung Garam's hand, the foot was squeezed tightly, as if it were caught in some trap. Surprised, the man looked down and discovered a finger–Jung Garam's finger–holding onto his foot. "W-What's going on!"

Goosebumps running up and down his arms, the man shook his foot recklessly to release his foot, but, instead of falling off, the fingers continued to tighten.

"…Aa…Arghh!"

Crack.

The pain of his toe bone breaking followed the sound. Eventually, the man screamed, raised his legs, and gave one last ridiculous shake. However, the man's foot continued to shrink from the force of Jung Garam's grip.

The tip of the man's boot ran red with blood, and it seemed like his foot would soon crumple into a bizarre shape. Only then was the man released; of course, he lost his balance and collapsed onto the floor.

At that moment, Jung Garam, who had his eyes closed for a while, opened his eyes again.

TL: Whew, two chapters out today. I’m running out of stockpile, to be honest, but I didn’t want to leave you guys with only the last chap >.<

I also forget how detailed this novel can get about its … blood and torture.

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Chapter 149

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While rolling on the floor in pain, the man looked at Jung Garam's heart, where [Gae Bolg] should have penetrated. Rather than the throbbing pain emanating from his foot, the question, 'How is Jung Garam alive right now?' bothered him more.

Suddenly, he felt something disharmonious–Jung Garam was too clean even though the spear should have penetrated to his heart. His combat suit was clean; there was only a hole that indicated the attack connected. The Assassin's mouth or nose was clean and there were no signs of bleeding.

Astonished, the man shouted, "Hnnngh…..W-Who are you!"

"My timing was impeccable. Wasn't it?" Jung Garam shouted.

"Are you crazy?" his companion said.

However, no one answered the man's question. He was able to find the answer on his own as soon as Jung Garam slowly plucked [Gae Bolg] out of his heart.

Despite the tremendous injury–the spear penetrated through the body–Jung Garam's movement wasn't restricted at all. He pulled the spear out as if he were removing a small thorn attached to his clothes. The tip of the spear had diverged like a tree root, broken into many pieces. Still, there was no blood.

The body, which was supposed to have sustained a terrible wound, instead held a black hole that seemed to suck in all light before slowly disappearing. Less than 10 seconds after removing [Gae Bolg], it became fine.

Unlike the man who was utterly shocked at that sight, Jung Garam and his companion did not pay that much attention, as if they had expected this to happen.

Jung Garam's companion even shouted fearlessly at that monstrous Assassin, "I knew you'd be safe anyway!"

"What….why do you sound so annoyed? No way, you didn't think I'd actually get hurt by this toy, did you?"

"Of course I'm worried! Useless–why did you block it like that…!"

"But it didn't hurt at all? Being undead has its advantages."

"But you might have been reverse summoned…"

"Hey, that's only something someone sloppy like Lee-kyung-ie would be worried about."

"Argh…..Fine."

The man felt like a distant observer as he watched the two squabble with each other… Undead? Did that mean Jung Garam had been revived? If that's the case, with what ability?

In addition, his companion wasn't shaken by Jung Garam's grotesque appearance. The man trembled, recalling how, until a short while ago, he had thought of calling the others through an emergency call. No matter how many people would rush in, Jung Garam's body would only suffer these creepy holes that would quickly fade away. However, if his side were stabbed and slashed at…

'That monster…'

Could they even win?

However, just as he thought that, the man made eye contact with Jung Garam and his smiling pupils. The man shuddered at the Assassin's terrifying bloodthirst; Jung Garam turned towards his companion and said, "Lee-kyung-ah, you should leave the fenced area."

"Huh?"

"I'm still not done with him."

"Ah…" Jung Garam's companion, as if he had seen something in the air, gave a queer look before eventually nodding and turning around.

The man wanted to avoid being left alone with Jung Garam. So, he wanted to cling to him and turn him around no matter what, but, the moment the man opened his mouth, something painfully squeezed his throat. "Cough, Cough…"

Jung Garam, who suddenly silently approached, stepped on the man's throat. Looking down at the man, the Assassin stood with his index finger over his lips, shushing him.

* * *

Jung Garam left the fenced area faster than I expected. I knew his resentment ran quite deep, so I had expected him to take his time torturing Park Hoseok…but I was a little surprised to see him come back in less than 10 minutes.

[Your level has risen significantly from soothing a servant's grudge.]

[A new class skill has been unlocked.]

[For succeeding at revenge far beyond your current capability, the Necromancer’s ability has been greatly increased.]

In addition, the notification of his successful revenge, confirming the deed, was still ringing in my ears.

For now, I decided to check the messages later and removed them all from sight. When all the blurry system messages disappeared, my eyes calmly met Jung Garam’s gaze.

“What?” The Assassin said.

“N-Nothing…”

“Disappointed that I came out so early?”

“……” I was more curious about Jung Garam’s state of mind rather than disappointed. When I first saw Park Hoseok’s face, my heart pounded, cold sweat dampened my back. Considering how little contact Park Hoseok and I had, it was a bit strange how agitated I was–no matter how important this trap was, would I normally feel this way?

Probably, the vengeful ghost memory I had witnessed when I contracted with Jung Garam was influencing me. If so…then if my emotions fluctuate so much from indirect memory, Garam, the party directly involved, would be…

‘…There’s no way he’d feel fine even if you put up a casual front.’

Even if Park Hoseok became a ruined mess, I wouldn’t feel sorry for him. In fact, if I were a bit more daring, I would’ve wanted to watch instead of leaving the fenced area.

However, it felt as if Jung Garam had finished his grand revenge very blandly, as if he hadn’t fought Park Hoseok a few more times and just gave it up easily.

“Choi Lee-kyung, give me your hand.”

“Huh? Uh…”

However, Jung Garam suddenly asked me for my hand without saying anything else, as if that all didn’t matter. I reached out my hand without thinking too hard, and a soft, white hand grasped mine.

The feel of his [summoned] state definitely felt different. The soul felt cold and smooth, right now he was just like a living being–warm. It felt like touching skin.

“How does it feel to hold hands with such a handsome boy?” Garam asked.

“It’s nice…?”

“What?”

I said yes without giving it much thought, and Jung Garam, the proclaimed handsome boy, opened his eyes wide and looked up at me. It was probably because I accepted his teases so docilely.

“….Tch.” Jung Garam stared at me for a while, inflated his cheeks with air, and clicked his tongue as if he were dissatisfied. As expected, he had lost a lot of his steam because I wasn’t flustered. “Holding my hand doesn’t seem to make you nervous.”

“What’s there to be nervous about…”

“You would’ve been jumping up and down for joy if it were hyung.”

As it turned out, he wasn’t acting that way because his teases weren’t working–there was another reason. Furthermore, his assumptions were correct.

Why now, of all times, were Kim Olim and Seo Dawon not here to be a barrier; while listening to Jung Garam, I looked around reflexively. Then, just in case, I closed my mouth.

Jung Garam continued to mumble to himself even without a response from me, “I knew it. I should have died after I grew a bit taller.”

“…Don’t say such weird things.”

“I want to grow taller.”

“Mmm… Would you have grown much more?”

“Of course I would! Is that even a debate? Choi Lee-kyung, I would’ve grown much taller than you.” Jung Garam shouted, angrily. But, when I saw his chubby cheeks, I felt somehow amused and laughed. Usually, Jung Garam would beat me in a battle of words every day–this elated feeling must be why people tease others.

However, who knows: if Jung Garam were still alive, he may have grown taller… That thought made me feel bitter for no reason. I spoke sincerely, in order to soothe the sulky Jung Garam, “Height doesn’t mean much. Appearance isn’t the only thing that matters after all…”

Of course I hesitated a bit afterwards, recalling Jung Garam’s personality…

Jung Garam, though, listened to my words and asked, as if he were curious, “Then, what’s important to you?”

“Huh?”

“What kind of person do you like?”

He looked so serious; I felt that I shouldn’t answer jokingly, so I fell into contemplation. However, I was a little annoyed that I had no good answer, because the name that came immediately to mind was Seo Dawon.

“I like warm-hearted people.”

So, as if I were making a pledge to myself, I answered with a characteristic that was the farthest from Seo Dawon. After hearing my

answer, Jung Garam opened his mouth as if he had something to say, but Kim Olim and Seo Dawon had returned so he couldn't continue.

"Did you really leave the corpse out in the open for all others to see?" Kim Olim brought up matters concerning Park Hoseok, so the atmosphere had definitely cooled down between us. I looked carefully down and awkwardly wriggled the hand Jung Garam was still holding.

Jung Garam replied shamelessly, nodding his head, "Because I heard something funny."

"What's that?"

"He said that when he sent a signal, all those involved in the [Red Lotus] incident would gather."

"Did you learn what the signalling method was?"

"Yep. So I thought we could use it."

When I heard them, I wondered what condition Park Hoseok's body could currently be in, but I tried to suppress my curiosity. Seo Dawon and Kim Olim exchanged looks and nodded.

"It's a bit early, but that's not so bad."

"It won't be so simple to pass this off as a simple disappearance…this would be a good way to draw attention."

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: RIP Jung Garam, it’s okay. I like short and cute boys too–we don’t all have to be 180/190 cm giants. Park Hoseok was definitely in over his head–his death really was setting up something else…a ‘foothold’ to the rest of the members.

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Chapter 150

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I had no idea what kind of fate Park Hoseok met, so I just listened to their conversation quietly. Then, since this place wasn't suitable to continue talking in detail, we first returned to Koo Kyungman's villa.

"The last person Park Hoseok officially met was the green-haired guy. From HaHae guild."

"Ah, Mmm…"

"So, I paid some attention to the decoration–a visual spectacle for Bae Jaemin's eyes." After entering the villa's living room, Jung Garam rolled around on the sofa, like a self-satisfied cat with a bright smile.

I wondered what he did to Park Hoseok, but Jung Garam simply chuckled to himself with a cheeky face. Although he made such a cute sight for sore eyes, I was strangely terrified to ask for further details on what he had done.

However, Kim Olim was different from my scaredy-cat self. She asked direct questions, disregarding Jung Garam's bizarre vibe. "There was something missing from Park Hoseok's corpse; do you have it?"

"Nope. I threw a few pieces off the cliff. Ah! I also fed him some pieces too."

"To Park Hoseok?"

“Ye~ep.”

“Excuse me… Sorry. I’m going to go and wash up…” I rose up from my seat from the horrifying implications I had heard. I felt a bit nauseous. I didn’t want to show such weakness, but it was hard to endure, especially as it brought up memories of Koo Kyungman. As expected, I shouldn’t have heard that…

“What, Choi Lee-kyung! Are you scared?”

“……Your complexion looks poor.” However, Kim Olim supported me without any criticisms as I stumbled my way out. I don’t know about Seo Dawon, but I wasn’t immune to Kim Olim’s kindness; I was visibly flustered when she held onto my waist.

However, soon, Kim Olim’s touch felt cool like an ice pack; I felt so good momentarily that I involuntarily made a strange noise. “Nngh…!”

“……?” Jung Garam stared up at me with a puzzled expression. Kim Olim paused for a brief moment, but soon placed a hand on the opposite side of my back, patting earnestly. Because of that, I felt both incredibly embarrassed and incredibly good at the same time; I stood still, mouth shut, unsure of what to do.

I mean, the pleasant feeling was just as if all my fatigue had melted away… But I felt like I was going crazy, holding back my strange moans and noises. What if Kim Olim thought that I was a pervert?!

“E-Enough! Really! Right now…everything’s fine!” I hurriedly tried to escape Kim Olim’s touch, but she gently subdued me.

“Why refuse me? You should become honest,” she muttered.

“Olim-noona, you just said something too lewd right now.”

“Sooner or later, you’ll need to drive out those evil inclinations within your head.”

“I’m sorry…”

It felt like a vibrating massager that could also chill my knots. In the end, after being captured, I melted softly into the sofa.

Kim Olim, thankfully, did not point out my unsightly conduct and lightly placed a hand on my head. Whether or not there was meaning to her touch, my confused brain slowly calmed down as she patted my hair. The throbbing headache that was stimulated by the recurrence of cruel memories soon subsided.

“W-What just happened…” After 10 minutes, I returned to my senses, wiped the saliva off my mouth, and blushed.

“It’s nothing,” Kim Olim answered, in a tone that lacked arrogance.

I had no idea when he entered the room, but Seo Dawon leaned crookedly at the entrance, arguing with Kim Olim in a sarcastic tone, “And you had said you’d never even speak to people of ‘that kind of attribute.'”

“It’s not that I like doing this. He looked so much like a puppy shaking in the rain, I had to show mercy.” Kim Olim responded without much heat– instead, she nodded as if she wasn’t particularly bothered.

Honestly, what did Kim Olim think of me…? She’d been comparing me to cute animals since earlier. What did she say last time? I think she called me hamster-like…

‘Maybe…have we become closer?’

Of course, the atmosphere between us had softened much more than the first time we met. However, Kim Olim glanced at me and stoop up abruptly as soon as our eyes met. Her gaze was very cold.

Bewildered, I reflexively stretched out my hand, but Kim Olim avoided it very easily. Then, in a cold tone, she said, “Don’t look at me with those teary eyes. It’s not like you’re some abandoned cat.”

“T-That’s…not it…”

“It’s not like I want to be attached to you. No matter how much your hair may look like a maltese, no means no.” With that said, she strode into her room.

“Cough…”

“Pfft…”

Of course, after Kim Olim vanished, Jung Garam and Seo Dawon burst into laughter.

I touched my hair absentmindedly after hearing Kim Olim’s words. I’d often heard that it felt like dog fur, but… (Maybe because it’s so soft and thin.) I didn’t like hearing comparisons between me and malteses from other people, but it didn’t feel so bad coming from Kim Olim.

Anyway, thanks to the Paladin, the rate of my trembling had calmed down. Though Jung Garam was vibrating from excitement, he perceived my uneasiness; thus, I learned about what had happened today through tomorrow’s news.

* * *

[Jeju User Murder and Mutilation Case…Victim was a Famous and Large Guild Executive]

[Park Hoseok – Ex Red Dragon Executive Assassinated… Suspect Still At Large] [1]

[‘Extraterritorial Jurisdiction’ and Users, Can we continue like this?]

[Han Heon-hwee ‘I will spare no effort in cooperation with the investigation. I will mobilize all our efforts.’]

[Director of the User Research Insitute: ‘We strongly suspect the suspect’s class to be Warrior due to the melee attack patterns… The Korean Warriors Association must pay attention to how much senseless media reports are generated from them.]

[Tensions between Rankers as reported by the polarizing tabloid. ‘Searching for the murder suspect’ is now trending on Social Media.]

The news was reported at around 3 pm, about 4 hours after we returned to the Seoul Hub. Perhaps because such an important man was murdered so gruesomely, photos of Park Hoseok and our assassination site were covering all the channels.

Those that appeared to be Park Hoseok’s bereaved family and his acquaintances could also be seen howling their grief. I had no idea how much Park Hoseok’s wife was aware of, but she seemed to be a famous influencer on Social Media. As a celebrity, the way she cried so devastatingly was not even mosaicized. To be honest, that pitiful appearance wasn’t a pleasant sight to see, so I skipped all the excessive interviews with the bereaved family and focused on the news report.

On a User-related broadcasting network called Channel H, experts from all walks of life were discussing the current incident on an urgently organized live broadcast; I watched that very closely.

An announcer began, “Honestly, though, the general public must be wondering who on earth that man is and why his murder is such big news?”

Afterwards, the announcer’s attention turned to a person named Moon Cheol-gu, a Warrior with a fairly high level of repute. Although he’s currently retired from active duty, he often appeared as an entertainer in various broadcasting programs and worked as an expert on User and Hub related matters.

Moon Cheol-gu calmly received the announcer’s gaze, nodded, and answered in a steady tone, “That’s right. And, it’s true that there aren’t

many cases in which the victim was murdered in such a horrific way. It would probably be difficult for those that aren't Users to really understand the embodied horror."

"Yes, yes."

"However… This victim was one our country's top 100 in terms of pure martial force."

"You mean, among the Users, right?"

"Right. I'm saying that there aren't many Users that could deal with him alone."

"Ahhh… It would be impossible for ordinary people or those with ordinary weapons."

"Yes, that's right. In a way, that would narrow our list of culprits. But the problem is…"

"Yes?"

"Someone that would be just a bit stronger than the victim… It doesn't make sense."

"What part doesn't make sense?"

"Ah, can I add to that?" At that moment, someone–a middle-aged woman with white hair and a white doctor's coat–raised her hand and interrupted the conversation. As soon as the screen focused on her, the captions informed us of her name and profession.

[Korean User Research Institute, Senior Researcher Kim Aera]

"Results of the initial investigation into the victim and the crime scene are now being shared in real time. According to what has been revealed so far, the victim was attacked by only one person and was disgraced. At least, so far that's what we know." Kim Aera-ssi said with her sharp and powerful

voice, tucking in her chin. As soon as she finished speaking, the panelists all became silent and stared at her.

Looking at the crowd, Kim Aera's eyes brightened. "The suspect made light of someone within the top 100–furthermore, they made light of the owner of the legendary [Gae Bolg]. One single person…that's what result we've concluded from the data provided. Even considering the traces left at the scene and the wounds left on the victim's body, it must have been a one-sided fight."

"Oh my goodness."

"Huh…"

"Thus, the culprit must be a ranker. That's an inevitable conclusion."

"Oh my gosh…"

"Since he was so horrifically murdered–enough that it was difficult to open your eyes and observe the carnage–there's a high probability that the suspect had some sort of grudge with the victim. Although we lack details currently, it was said that there were meaningful phrases written at the scene. So drastic and brutal; this crime intended to draw attention. This incident was particularly shocking for the industry experts."

Ah, so that was why there was a witch hunt on social media. Photos of celebrity-level melee Users were collected; posts claiming, 'There's a culprit among those!' were constantly being shared. Additionally, all the top posts in the User-based community I often visited, [Ranking God], were about this incident.

'If we get caught while sentiments are high like this…'

I was suddenly engulfed with anxiety.

TL: MC: therapy puppy extraordinaire, Kim Olim: Massive tsundere

Also it’s interesting how the world at large reacts to the party and their machinations. There’s definitely more and more people that Lee-kyung-ie has to watch out for now.

Footnotes

1. = literally means to be lost in fog. In criminal terms, it means that the suspect is still on the run or that no one knows who they are.

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Chapter 151

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Suddenly, the reality of what we did skyrocketed within me. It would be a problem to be caught and kidnapped by Bae Jaemin's group, but the narrowing scope of the investigation also placed great pressure on me.

Moreover, although it was different from my current situation, there had been a case in the past where a User's summon accidentally killed a person. The case went all the way to the supreme court; it charged the summoner with manslaughter.

To summarize, if my summons or vengeful ghosts inflict damage on others, I'll go to jail. In my case, I would be charged with murder since I participated voluntarily–their death wasn't a mistake.

The funny thing is, though, this wasn't the first time I've committed a crime… 'It's different from the situation with Koo Kyungman.'

Now I realized what line I crossed. With Koo Kyungman, I didn't feel like an active participant, perhaps because Koo Hui-seo had finalized everything. Have I been too complacent?

However, regardless of my inner turmoil, the panelists on TV continued to speak. "So, if the murderer is discovered, what kind of punishment will the User receive? Are Users also imprisoned in ordinary prisons?"

"No. The hub has special facilities for imprisoning Users. The exact location isn't disclosed for security reasons, but vicious criminals who commit murder, assault, rape and such cannot enjoy freedom just because

he’s a User. Users cannot escape from this special facility and two of our country’s L-class Users work as managers there.”

“That’s a relief. In all honesty, doesn’t the general public feel a vague sense of fear of Users? This time, the crime affected another User, but the general public is far more vulnerable than other Users.”

“Of course. There’s…little chance that they could be a worthy opponent when it comes to pure martial force.”

“However, that doesn’t mean all Users should be branded as potential criminals. Most Users–most of these supposed people that make the general public uncomfortable–devote their lives to research within the Hub or dungeoneering. Despite the dangers the dungeons provide, haven’t they been steadily raiding and clearing them out?”

“Yes. However, it’s also true that there’s huge rewards involved.”

“If you say they do what they do just because of the potential rewards…”

“But, these days Users have far too much extra-legal authority; there are too many provisions made by the Special User Act that violate the constitution. Haven’t there been cases where that’s been abused?”

There were many different opinions among the panelists, so their voices began to raise gradually. There seemed to be differing stances between those who were on the User’s side and those that wanted to shackle Users.

After checking into the conversation this far, I connected to [Ranking Gods], the User community. Park Hoseok’s story dominated the top posts when I had checked earlier, but, as I expected, this incident also populated the daily boards as well.

In the end, succumbing to my restlessness, I began to thoroughly read all the new posts on [Ranking Gods]; among those, there was one post that stood out.

****

<Hey, I’m a C-class civil servant living in exile>

Author:

Apparently that psycho wrote about ‘Red Lotus’ something or another, you know [1]

Also, the H H guild members are crowding all over the place

Apparently B J M is going to arrive tomorrow

[Like] [Dislike]

Likes: 0
Dislikes: 0

Comments (Expand)

Dodam: Are you on the island too? All the civil servants are in emergency mode, fuck

└**Author:** Real, what the heck is this…ha….I took a vacation, but was asked to return to organize a list of all the Users that came and went -_-

: Saw the body? lolol

└**Author:** nope, I just went to the scene in the morning and only watched the tape

OTL [2] : What's this about Red Lotus?

└**Author:** It's what the criminal wrote, you know

└**OTL:** On the ground??

└**Author:** I'm not too sure either, but probably??

└**OTL:** Wow..You think it the murder was maybe committed by someone loyal to the Red Lotus?

Venus: To think that Red Lotus fans would go as far as murder *tremble tremble*. Maybe while arguing HaHae vs Red Lotus they just went and did it.

└ **:** Lolololololololololol

└**Danga:** You can laugh at a time like this?

└**Venus:** This wasn't a joke you no-fun scholar bastard lolol [3]. Just how many of those bastards flooded [Ranking Gods] when Red Lotus fell, claiming that Red Lotus was still alive lolol. They even dragged Bae Jaemin, asking why he was the only one alive lolololol. Every day, about 100 times, they constantly doubted him.

└ **:** Real, listening to those Red Lotus-fans, you could totally believe they could get angry and stab people.

└**Talgat is an Intellectual:** Satan would shake his head–they bombarded Bae Jaemin with death threats

<What the criminal wrote on the ground>

Author: Top Notch Hunter

'To my old friends – From Jung Garam'

[Like] [Dislike]

Like: 53
Dislike: 7

Comments (Expand)

Volvara: Crazy kekekekekeke

Sae Geumho: Insane…

Ji-hee: For real?

└**Author:** Link to the Article

└**Ji-hee:** holy shit [4]

Big Ta: What's Red Lotus? It was mentioned above.

└**Author:** The most famous Garam among the Users was Red Lotus's Jung Garam.

└**Big Ta:** Ahh…Then the criminal pretended to be Jung Garam and wrote something??

└**Author:** yup

: Was it really a Red Lotus stan [5]…

: But, I heard they used the same skills as Jung Garam?? According to the article, the skill analysis concluded that it's about 98% consistent.

└**Slight Salty:** Assassin skills are all the same–the culprit must be from the same assassin subclass

└ **:** Aha, ty ty [6]

May: Red Lotus stans are so excruciatingly tiresome.

Yogurt: Wow, they really stabbed someone

└**Yogurt:** Honestly, doesn't this just sour Red Lotus's image even more? To be honest, after their death, public opinion has turned to shit because of these fans.

Writer: Park Hoseok's fingers were detected in the corpse's stomach, separated a ways away from the crime scene, and ripped into a few pieces here and there. Judging by the estimated time of death, he was still alive for a few minutes after being cut apart.

└**Face:** *vomit*

└ **:** Disgusting

└**Czech:** Wow, fuck

Salape: Aren't there Witches who can divine a User's past?

└**Writer:** A few may pop up here eventually

: lolol well done. Fuckers, pretending like they've done nothing, swallowing Red Lotus's businesses little by little at a dirt cheap price.. Whenever the community or the media says that they're acting a bit suspicious, they'll sue and keep their mouths shut lololol. It was also fishy how suddenly Red Lotus's image became arrogant lololol. Park Hoseok must have died because he's done something worth killing him *tremble tremble* kekekekeke

└ **:** Red Lotus stan–arrest him

└**Face:** *siren noise*

└**Makya:** I guess you really have this level of intelligence in order to be a Red Lotus fan.

: Wow, then is [Gae Bolg] going up on Auction soon? T_T I wanted it~

└ **:** Are you insane? lolololol

└**Sarge:** lololol how fucking funny lolol

└**Light and Shadow:** Honestly, I thought the same…

└**Calling:** lololol Honestly, if you didn't think this way for at least 1 second, then you're not a User.

└ **:** All of Satan's teachers are gathering here

└**Author:** [Gae Bolg] was destroyed…

******

Most of the articles had little substances, but a few had accurate details about the situation and photos of the scene. In particular, the last article I read had information on what Jung Garam had written.

I read all the comments, feeling a bit bewildered, '…Was it really okay for Garam to say all that?'

Of course, the public already knew that Jung Garam was dead, so it'll be difficult to connect those messages to me and perhaps confuse the investigation, but…But Bae Jaemin or the other targets of revenge may notice.

However, as if he had noticed my worries, Jung Garam, who had gone away for a while, entered the living room and approached me immediately, "What's up?"

"It's the…News…I've just been watching it a little."

"Hmmm." Jung Garam leaned on the sofa, showing little signs of agitation, and grabbed the remote control, flipping through the channels. He started watching variety show reruns…

I glanced at Jung Garam and asked, "By the way… Was it okay for you to leave your name?"

“Yeah? Hyung also gave me permission.”

I didn’t think that he would have gotten permission from Seo Dawon… Now that I think about it, Jung Garam was the type to persuade me at all costs if he thinks he’s toe-ing the line, rather than recklessly enforcing his will.

So, I was slightly relieved, but suddenly a red alarm notice floated across the show that Jung Garam was watching. Breaking news slowly followed.

[Jeju corpse-scattering murder suspect arrested…34 year-old male User (Assassin)…Arrested while on the run.]

…What?

Startled, I stood up; Jung Garam turned to look at me. He must have seen the breaking news as well. However, Jung Garam’s expression was bland, as if he was not surprised.

“N-no way, did we frame…?” Look at Jung Garam’s sassy face, I asked if we had prepared a scapegoat in advance, but he shook his head.

“It’s just…if you’re an Assassin with a criminal record, they’ll just pin everything on you. I guess we might as well thank them for making such wild guesses.” As if he expected such a situation–as if he expected no difficulty in getting away–he sounded relaxed.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: We’re definitely in the calm before the storm. BTW, , as you guys have probably guessed, isn’t exactly a name. It’s used as a placeholder, or ‘anonymous’ username in this novel.

Thanks for being patient you guys! Once again, schoolwork is piling up (got to grade so many students T_T) and I've been trying to both turbo this novel and another one (also BL! It's still early, but check it out if you'd like! It's called Show me your Stats! MC, after learning his estranged family had died and must now become the new lord of the region, wakes up to an ability that shows others' stats (including their affection for him). There's only about a year left till everything is ruined, and he has to learn to run his fiefdom well as well as find out who murdered his family!)

Footnotes

1. = common internet slang way to say "You know" or "Got it"
2. = Bending over, prone, in a servile position. That's essentially OTL in chatting slang.
3. = Scholar-type. But in a derogatory way (no fun, is always serious, doesn't know how to loosen up)
4. (hul) = a sound or exclamation of disbelief
5. Stan = Extreme Fan
6. = thank you thank you, except highly abbreviated. Common in Korean chat speak.

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Afterwards, similar reports began to pop up one after another. However, by evening, the report corrected itself: emergency circumstances revealed that the crime was not committed by one person, but there was a helper on the murderer’s side.

As soon as I saw that report, anxiety began to grip me without control– maybe the investigation team had already uncovered that I was there.

However, the reports only revealed the possibility of an accessory to the crime, and there was no proper information on that matter. I stayed up all night, anxious, but no one contacted or visited us.

“Lee-kyung-ie, you’re a C-class User with no criminal record; you wouldn’t be subject to investigation,” Seo Dawon said, but I was still insecure. My meal barely passed through my lips, and the tips of my nails were so tattered because I had bit them in a fit of nervousness.

Eventually, Seo Dawon could no longer endure and held my hands, sitting down, and patting my fingers. Of course, I knew he was correct, but I dreamed a nightmare where the police chased me continuously whenever I began to fall asleep. Shocked, I repeatedly woke up throughout the night.

“I know, but… Haah. I’m nervous for some reason.”

“If you continue like this, the state of your face will be your confession.”

“Haah…”

Seo Dawon spoke in a preposterous tone, but he didn't abandon my hysterical self. Without teasing me capriciously, he comforted me so that evening I could calm down and fall asleep.

After resting like that for a few days, Koo Hui-seo and Kim Sangyoon visited our lodgings.

A while ago, through Koo Hui-seo, we had received an invitation to a party where the traitors, including Ryu Hyerin, would gather. So, we had planned on sending Kim Sangyoon as Koo Hui-seo's plus one to spy on their actions.

However, because Park Hoseok was murdered, the party was cancelled. Well, officially, the reason given was the rental site had delayed their reservation for about a month due to various circumstances, but Seo Dawon predicted that they would spare themselves until the culprit was caught–and the identity of the person claiming to be Jung Garam was revealed.

That was why we called the two to our place in order to discuss our changed plans. Of course, this time Seo Dawon was [summoned].

"Hyung-nim. How have you been faring…" Kim Sangyoon, who lived close to us, arrived first. Before leaving for Jeju Island, I asked him to take care of Lackey. Perhaps because of that, Lackey seemed to acknowledge the Warrior.

[Clack Clack.]

Lackey clacked its teeth without any threatening intent, circled around the Warrior as if it were observing him, and ran back into my embrace. Kim Sangyoon also seemed to have become used to Lackey's presence; he entered the living room without paying much attention to the skeleton.

"I missed you," Koo Hui-seo said.

"Even if you open your arms wide like that, I won't cuddle you…"

"I was going to greet you, French-style…"

“This is Korea.”

“You’re too much…”

About five minutes after Kim Sangyoon arrived, Koo Hui-seo also appeared. He opened his arms wide at the entrance as if he meant to hug me, but I coldly avoided him. Koo Hui-seo entered the living room, pretending [My crops have withered, my face is breaking out. This sparks no joy].

And Seo Dawon, who didn’t even greet Kim Sangyoon or Koo Hui-seo even though he was the one to invite them, sat cross-legged on the sofa, adopting an arrogant posture.

Intimidated by the Mage, Kim Sangyoon sat on the edge, as far away from him as possible; Koo Hui-seo, not reading the room, sat right next to me. Only after I placed my forehead into my palm and pointed Koo Hui-seo to a seat a small distance away did the suffocating atmosphere begin to subside.

“The Jeju Island incident has become a bit inconvenient.” Koo Hui-seo spoke first, cutting through the awkward [1] atmosphere. His tone was gentle, but, when he stopped sipping at his tea, his forehead was crumpled, as if he were recalling some annoyances.

“The police came to call a few times because of the pass. It was only a cursory investigation, but I still had the issue with my brother… Things nearly became quite cumbersome. If you were going to finish the job like this, then it would have been nice for you to have mentioned it in advance,” Koo Hui-seo said, glancing at Seo Dawon. It seemed that our use of the pass during Park Hoseok’s murder and subsequent investigation had caused a formal inquiry.

Surprised, I asked him, “Then…do the police know that we were there?”

“Of course, I’ve prepared documents in advance so we wouldn’t run into problems. The documents state Lee-kyung-ssi as my personal trainer.”

“Personal trainer?”

“Yes. Ah, don’t worry. We’re not talking about a gym trainer, but a mental health counselor. Well, if they dig deep, I suppose they’ll notice that Lee-kyung-ssi doesn’t have any of the related necessary licenses, but… You aren’t prescribing medicine, and I’m merely mentally dependent on you. Paying money for various services like that–that’s not illegal, is it?”

I was grateful to Koo Hui-seo for making a far more nuanced document than I had expected. We’d received help from him once again; I felt a little sorry for putting him in trouble…

Seo Dawon smiled haughtily, as if he heard something ridiculous. “Learn your place well. Did you forget that we rescued you from something ‘cumbersome’ as well?”

Confidently…he treated Koo Hui-seo like a tool to be used.

I was flustered, alternating staring between the two, but Koo Hui-seo didn’t seem to be offended. That didn’t mean he seemed to be cowed and unable to speak back, however.

Koo Hui-seo maintained his calm tone but continued to say everything he had to say, “Yes…but isn’t there a problem with how much noise you’ve made? I’m unsure if this is the correct timing to draw so much attention…”

“There’s no evidence anyway; it’s no use to whining here. This matter should be solved by lawyers, anyway.”

“I’m saying, the problem is that there are a few people that are clinging to me.”

“Where?”

“The Police.”

That was why Koo Hui-seo arrived here in a different car for camouflauge. He implored us to be careful when we did something under

his name in the future. He probably came here today to convey this message to us–he was so resolute.

‘It’ll be difficult for Koo Hui-seo to be an active force until he’s cleared of all charges from the Koo Kyungman matter…’

It couldn’t be helped, but it was indeed quite regrettable since we still relied a lot on Koo Hui-seo’s support. However Seo Dawon immediately looked towards Kim Sangyoon, who had been listening to the entire conversation as if it were another’s trouble. “Then, why don’t you leave all the money-laundering to him?”

“Huh?”

“Him?”

“Mhmm. I think Sangyoon-ie will want to help us.”

“What? Ah… Yes. O-Of course…. Ha. Ha. Ha.” Kim Sangyoon looked disconcerted, but after laughing awkwardly he shifted his posture. “In the first place, my tax accountant advised me to open a business… Shall we ask them?” He responded, without a sign of reluctance.

I hadn’t mentioned to Kim Sangyoon that we planned to murder Park Hoseok, but based on the series of events, there was no way he couldn’t have known we were the culprits.

However, Kim Sangyoon didn’t even seem to be curious about Park Hoseok’s fate and, although he was still intimidated by the Mage, his attitude was quite cooperative. It seemed like his ‘brain’ underwent some transformation… But, wasn’t it more normal to become even more afraid when someone, who had already been threatening death, committed a murder? What was this? What was this subtly lax attitude…

However, before I could puzzle out the incongruity, Seo Dawon spoke first, “There’s something I should point out before all that; I didn’t kill Park Hoseok.”

“……”

“……”

Of course, it was Jung Garam who killed Park Hoseok, and Seo Dawon didn’t kill him directly, but…

‘Why on earth would you reveal that?’

Koo Hui-seo and Kim Sangyoon inevitably looked towards Seo Dawon, speechless at the Mage’s unexpected words. Kim Sangyoon looked a little confused, but soon his eyes widened as if he noticed the implications. Seemingly startled by the thought that popped into his head, he hurriedly asked with a squeak, “W-well then, maybe… Just like Dawon-nim, did Jung Garam also…”

“That’s right.”

“Gasp…”

It seems that Kim Sangyoon was operating under the same misunderstanding he made with Seo Dawon–that Jung Garam had somehow secretly survived. Since he had already seen Seo Dawon once, he didn’t even doubt Seo Dawon’s claims and more readily accepted Jung Garam’s survival.

Of course, the two hadn’t actually returned to life fully, but…I was still insecure in explaining the circumstances of their resurrection and the role of the Necromancer to the Warrior, so I kept my mouth shut.

However, Seo Dawon didn’t stop there. “And, in the future, all the members of the [Red Lotus] guild that have said to have died will return.”

“Hurk…R-Really?”

“….”

At those words, Koo Hui-seo paused briefly, teacup placed at his lips.

TL: Lee-kyung has gotten so good at rebuffing Koo Hui-seo's advances.

As always it's the latter half of the semester so I'm slowing down just a tiny bit bc of work >.<
Thanks as always for reading <3

Footnotes

1. = slang term for awkward

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“However, many of my companions don’t want to come to the fore straight away. Bae Jaemin is still in good health, after all,” Seo Dawon said.

“I guess…”

“Then, when will Seo Dawon-ssi enter the limelight?” Koo Hui-seo asked for a specific time, following the flow of the conversation.

Seo Dawon answered the unexpected question smoothly without a hint of panic, “First of all, before setting a specific timeframe, we should break their bonds as much as possible. According to the information we received from Park Hoseok, those involved in the [Red Lotus] incident were supposed to be summoned if a specific signal was sent. If that knowledge becomes known to the outside world, perhaps their plans will crumble apart. After all, they must be closely monitoring those involved.”

After hearing those words, Koo Hui-seo fell silent momentarily before, slowly, starting to speak, “What do you mean by breaking their bonds? Even if we assassinate a few more people in the future, it will only raise their vigilance. That won’t collapse the relationships on its own.”

And, as if he had been waiting for that question, Seo Dawon nodded calmly and explained, “Right. If they think this murder was committed by an ‘outsider,’ they may band together even more, sharing information and trying to uncover their common enemy. However…do you really think that those people will think that this incident was caused by the [Red Lotus]?”

“They probably haven’t noticed your resurrection yet…”

“No, there’s a more fundamental issue at play. Even if my face were revealed, unless Lee-Kyung-ie’s existence was also similarly discovered, they may only think that the suspect was impersonating a [Red Lotus] guild member–they would never believe he’s real.” After saying that, Seo Dawon floated around the table a hologram that Jung Garam made. The hologram depicted a diagram of the relationship chart and character profiles that Kim Olim had briefly organized.

“This was made by only selecting, from those implicated in our downfall, those that are the heads of powerful guilds or competent rankers within the top 100. In a way, you could call these people key figures who contributed to [Red Lotus]’s ruin.” Seo Dawon said.

Furthermore, the profiles were classified into several groups. At one glance, I could tell it was roughly divided by guilds.

Seo Dawon pointed at Bae Jaemin’s photo, which stood atop the largest grouping of profiles, “However, they all aren’t part of one team. They just temporarily gathered hands during the [Red Lotus] incident. Actually, even when we were still alive, guilds never stopped litigating each other over trivial matters, right?”

Seo Dawon tapped at the edge of the desk; the screen containing the profiles was wiped clean and new letters began filling the hologram.

The changed contents now showcased large and small conflicts or lawsuits between the top guilds before the [Red Lotus] incident. The data was compiled from various newspaper articles and other credible sources, but there was also a graph at the very bottom.

While large and small lawsuit cases filed between guilds have been increasing, the number bottomed out–nearly to 0–after the [Red Lotus] event. Something smelled rancid.

“Suddenly lawsuits and quarrels all disappeared, and guild relations flourished. To summarize, the guilds that shared the [Red Lotus] huge

secret have gotten closer. In particular, in [Opera]'s case, while participating together in a raid with Koo Kyungman, Koo Kyungman accused an [Opera] guild member of using a skill and deliberately infringing against certain established agreements during the boss monster fight. The lawsuit, which was originally quite controversial, was abruptly dropped."

"Now that they're in the same boat, it seems as if they're willing to be less sensitive with each other."

"Right. However, let's think about it from a different perspective… Did they really become so intimate? I question that." Seo Dawon changed the screen back to the profile of the recently deceased Park Hoseok. "You know that Koo Kyungman used Park Hoseok like a spy, right? Bae Jaemin knew that. Even so, he tried to appease and win over Park Hoseok. Moreover, during his recent trip to Jeju Island, we uncovered that he sent his trusted guild members in order to bring him to his side completely. No matter if Koo Kyungman was currently missing, it felt as if Bae Jaemin had been waiting for the moment–as if ties forged during the [Red Lotus] incident could only go so far."

"Well…I guess now that the common enemy has disappeared, they need a place to wield their remaining blades."

In short, now that the [Red Lotus] issue had been taken care of, the relationships between the guilds began to deteriorate again, as it had in the past. Furthermore, he explained how, even if no one had noticed their collusion for these three years and everything had gone as they desired, it would not have taken long for one party to run out of patience.

What amazing timing.

If Seo Dawon had been revived a little earlier, then those people may still have been on guard against [Red Lotus], and the bond between them may still yet be strong, making it difficult to find opportunities to dig between them. In Park Hoseok's murder case, his death may have been

more thoroughly investigated. If they had, there was a higher chance that my existence would have been exposed.

However, three years had passed by–everything went as they had desired. And, no one could threaten their positions. Eventually, they forgot the [Red Lotus] and gradually became wary of each other, wanting to become the second [Red Lotus].

Koo Kyungman's sudden disappearance would be regarded as a golden opportunity rather than a reason to foster doubt. After all, the fall of one's enemy should be a cause for joy rather than vigilance…

"Then, will you now focus on human relations and use other's hands to punish your targets?"

"No, I'm planning on helping Bae Jaemin with his business for a while." Seo Dawon smiled and gave an unexpected answer to Koo Hui-seo's question.

Kim Sangyoon, who was listening calmly, also gave a puzzled look and raised his head. I honestly didn't understand his meaning well either, but, when I saw Seo Dawon's expression, I had a ridiculous inkling.

"For the time being, setting aside [HaHae], we'll punish other guild members. In particularly, I plan to first select those who are strongly opposed to and lobbying against Bae Jaemin's guild certification. So, in order to gather this information, we'll need you, Koo Hui-seo. Once we've gathered a list of names, spent money, sent people, or met them personally…the method doesn't matter. Find out as fast as you can who Bae Jaemin's biggest thorn is."

"Then, will Seo Dawon-ssi take care of those people?"

"That's right. I'll kill them all before Bae Jaemin can intervene."

Listening this far, Kim Sangyoon mumbled, "This series of murders could only be seen as advantageous to that person…" I also predicted that

several of these incidents would end up isolating Bae Jaemin within his alliance.

“Bae Jaemin will have a headache trying to get rid of the suspicion. Furthermore, the word [Red Lotus], like a taboo, will continue to appear at each scene.”

“Only a few people know about that matter, after all.”

“I… Then, what should I do?” Kim Sangyoon carefully asked the Mage, eyes shooting around and watching others’ reactions. Certainly compared to the previous operation, the Warrior was trying to be a more active participant.

Seo Dawon answered without hesitation, “Go into the dungeons with Lee-kyung-ie. It’s not long till he’s at the needed level.”

“Ahh… I understand.”

“I want to go too…” Of course, Koo Hui-seo, who rushed recklessly into any plans that involved me, quickly interrupted.

“Didn’t you say the police have their eyes on you?” Dawon responded, as if he were teasing.

Koo Hui-seo bit his thin lips and contemplated for a minute, “I can use a disguise. In the past, I used to cross-dress as a woman.”

“In the past? Uh, when?” I asked.

“Mmm… when I was seven?”

“That only worked because you were a child…”

Although he looked emaciated, Koo Hui-seo was well over 180cm tall… It would be strange for him to dress as a woman with that body stature…

“That…doesn’t really seem right, so don’t do that.” I said, repulsed.

However, Koo Hui-seo puffed his cheeks and shook his head, as if he were a whining elementary student. “…You’re too much. Then when can I be alone with Lee-kyung-ssi?”

“As long as I’m here, there’s no way you’ll be alone with him. It’s best for you to quickly abandon hope.”

“I didn’t ask Seo-Dawon-ssi.”

“Lee-kyung-ie shares my opinion.” Of course, his attitude rustled Seo Dawon’s temper. The Mage also needlessly brushed his lips against my forehead gently while lightly brushing my hair affectionately.

At that sight, Koo Hui-seo put his face into his hands and mumbled something (in a gloomy voice). The shadows under the sofa where he sat began to flash and tremble… Seo Dawon, rather than quitting, lowered his lips to my nose bridge.

Eventually, I had to awkwardly turn my head to the side to stop this ridiculousness. Damn it… If you’re going to fight with Koo Hui-seo, can’t you fight physically? And not like this?

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I…didn’t realize Koo Hui-seo was so tall. Also +1 crossdressing–I’m down for that.

I should take a look at the webtoon; I’m really curious about how they decided to name guilds/skills etc. Red Lotus, for example, could have been Pink (light red). I just chose to take the hanja/shorthand for Lotus instead, because I thought it sounded more thematic. Similarly, skill names could be done differently. (If so, do I need to standardize? >.<)

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The childish quarrel quickly subsided. Afterwards, we discussed a few more details and considered possible future variables.

Throughout the whole meeting, I wondered what Jung Garam and Kim were doing. Perhaps because the servants always clung to me and hovered around me, the quiet made me anxious.

Therefore, I sneakily glanced towards Seo Dawon; he briefly caught my eye but did not say anything. Because we couldn't speak about the other members in front of Koo Hui-seo and Kim sangyoon, I bowed my head

However, Seo Dawon suddenly asked in a kind voice, "Are you hungry?"

"……Huh?"

"Sorry. We talked for too long." Seo Dawon said before turning to the other two, "Let's organize everything else through email–send it to me."

He acted as if I were hungry. I was so bewildered, I lost the timing to deny it. Even more ridiculous, Koo Hui-seo and Kim Sangyoon, who didn't have much to say to me in particular, acquiesced and stopped their business.

"There's a nearby restaurant I know well." Koo Hui-seo had even naturally squeezed in that comment as he rose from his seat.

However, Seo Dawon hugged me, ignoring Koo Hui-seo's outstretched hand. "Lee-kyung-ie likes the food I make."

"W-What are you…"

"If Korean food is more to your taste, there's a place 10 minutes away by car…"

"Hyung-nim, do you dislike sushi?"

Of course, Seo Dawon was in charge of my meals, but I wasn't hungry enough to storm off so suddenly.

Flustered, I stared at Seo Dawon; his expression, though, was mysteriously flat. I was forced to nod after trying to read his eyes. It felt like he was entreating me to match his beat. "…I-I just…I want to eat the food…prepared by Dawon-ssi."

"You're eating now, right?"

"Yeah…" Faced with no choice, I nodded, feeling much like an immature child; Seo Dawon smiled contentedly. Soon after, he moved to immediately kick out Kim Sangyoon and Koo Hui-seo. "So, send the rest of the details to me by email. We'll set the time for the next meeting there."

"Wait a minute–we could at least have lunch with you…"

"Hyungnim! I also don't have anything to do today. My schedule's been cleared."

"I'm only going to prepare Lee-kyung-ie's share though? You guys find your own meal."

The two were rendered speechless at Seo Dawon's cold-hearted attitude and were finally kicked out of the home.

Pop–!

However, as soon as Seo Dawon closed the front door, I heard a strange noise–something, a bubble, bursting?–on the second floor. Startled, I looked towards the stairs; Seo Dawon clicked his tongue and hugged me from behind.

“Thankfully, we avoided some annoying issues.”

“W-What are you talking about?”

“Ah, we’ve almost reached my summon time limit.” As he said that, Seo Dawon brought the hand he used to hug my shoulders to my eye level. The hand that had been opaque until just a moment ago returned back to its vengeful ghost state. Did he send the others out urgently so they won’t witness him disappearing after time was up?

However, I was also bothered by the noise I heard from the second floor; before I could ask about it, Seo Dawon lifted me and carried me to the table. I was startled, but, since he acted so casual, I couldn’t find it within me to argue.

“First, let’s eat before talking.” Seo Dawon recommended, placing cups and utensils in front of me. Helpless in the face of his actions, I sat at the table.

* * *

Even as I ate the food that Seo Dawon made, I still heard concerning noises from the 2nd floor. Furthermore Jung Garam–when on earth did he appear?–suddenly came in through the garden side door. “Did Koo Hui-seo leave?”

“Yeah.”

“Mmmm…. the smell is rancid…”

“What smell?” I asked, wondering if he was talking about the grilled mackerel I was currently eating.

Jung Garam sat down next to me, wrinkling his nose. “…Lee-kyung-ie doesn’t smell anything bad from that bastard?” He leaned over onto the marble table and squashed his cheek on the surface as he talked. Rather than asking me, it sounded like he was directing his question to Seo Dawon who was calmly sitting to the side.

As expected, Seo Dawon replied, “Probably not. Lee-kyung-ie looks fine.”

“Haah… Can’t we just not invite that guy?”

“He won’t be able to come over often since he’s under police surveillance.”

“That’s a relief. It was getting worse and worse–it made me really want to murder him.”

‘…A bad smell?’ No way, did Jung Garam escape our home because of a smell I couldn’t perceive?

While thinking about that, I placed my spoon on the table and poked Jung Garam’s cheek. He closed his head as if he were suffering a migraine before turning to look at me.

“What’s the bad smell? Did you leave the house because of it?” I asked.

“Yeah… After all, he carries around that ‘garbage.'”

“Garbage?”

Although Koo Hui-seo was gaunt and a little pale, his attire was always immaculate. As soon as I wondered what the Assassin meant, I recalled the balck shadow that curled up beneath his sofa seat. When he says garbage… was he talking about that?

“You’re…talking about that shadow thing?”

“Yeah. Don’t you find it gross?”

Well, I did find it a bit threatening since I saw him destroy Koo Kyungman with it. However, I couldn’t smell it nor could I see its shape properly; I hadn’t thought much of the shadow. Furthermore, since Seo Dawon never reacted to it, I never realized…

While the two talked, I felt a presence approaching from the second floor; Kim Olim had walked down the stairs. It seems that the noise I had heard earlier was made by her–though I had no idea what she was doing.

Anyway, as she came down to the first floor, Kim Olim frowned slightly and crumpled her eyebrows before soon adopting an expressionless face. She approached the table where I sat, “Did you have a good meal? There’s something I have to say to you.”

“Ah, mnn. Okay…” I quickly cleared the dishes and sat back down again.

Kim Olim began to speak in a patient tone, “I wanted to share important information I just obtained. The Jeju Island case will be jointly investigated between the police and the Dungeon Association. And Moon Issak is the front person put forth by the Dungeon Association.”

“Moon Issak?”

“Hmmm…”

“Kek… That crazy bastard?”

Moon Issak was someone whose name I heard in passing at the Ahn hospital. To be exact, I heard that name while searching for the hidden room in the VIP ward–when I encountered Bae Jaemin, and he took me back to his room for an interrogation.

There, I learned that Bae Jaemin conducted a background investigation on me. He was suspicious of the fact that I, a doomed Necromancer and a

low-level User, would suddenly sell a large amount of Barnasiums. It was as if I had risen from the ground out of the blue.

I understood Bae Jaemin's suspicions; the Barnasiums weren't readily available items. Though, I had no idea what exactly tripped his wariness and what specific information he had uncovered.

In any case, Bae Jaemin finished his background check, and, as a result, he suddenly thought I had teamed up with a ranker named 'Moon Issak.'

Seo Dawon later said that Moon Issak's and my movements have recently overlapped, and Bae Jaemin seemed to have reached a hasty conclusion based on that information. In addition, Bae Jaemin must have been very sensitive since he was in a position where he needed help from Moon Issak and was at his mercy.

At that time, since Bae Jaemin found me suspicious, I had to march to his beat in order to turn away his doubts. As a result, we had even set up a nearly impossible dinner meeting between Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak.

Of course, we had no relationship with Moon Issak, but, in order to lure him, we baited him with Jung Garam's ability. Moon Issak responded to our call in order to receive a [black market] invitation, and we were able to deceive Bae Jaemin.

At that time, we sent Kim Sangyoon to the two's meeting, so Moon Issak and I had never actually met. I guess though he didn't know me, I one-sidedly had some information on him?

"If we're talking about Moon Issak… We're talking about that Paladin who has a horrible relationship with evil-attribute Users…" I began.

"That's right."

"Is there a reason why he's in charge of this case?"

"People say he volunteered."

"He wanted to do it?"

Though I’ve never personally experienced an encounter with Moon Issak, I turned pale–he’s someone who’s rumoured to have such a nefarious character.

Wasn’t it possible for our relation with Bae Jaemin to be dragged out if we continue to be entangled like this? Furthermore, I was an evil-attribute User–the subject of Moon Issak’s hatred.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I did a really quick once-over to proof-read! If you guys see any mistakes, feel free to tell me in the comments (Or @ me on the discord!) Speaking of which, there’s some readers that have been brought this way by the webtoon! Feel free to talk to me in the foxa discord~ I’m happy to talk about this with anyone!

Are ya’ll ready to meet Moon Issak officially?

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“He’s still living quite diligently, huh?” Seo Dawon muttered, though I couldn’t guess its meaning in a carefree manner. It seemed that I was the only one intimidated by such nefarious rumors.

Smiling, I chuckled and teased him, “Moon Issak… Didn’t you say you knew each other?”

“We met often for business,” Seo Dawon answered my question coyly; his voice laden with a teasing undertone.

“I really wanted to kill Moon Issak…” Next to us, Jung Garam, who stretched his body out like taffy, muttered. While speaking, as if he had returned to his senses, his body suddenly stood up, erasing all languidness.

“He has an extreme side…but he was a pure man.” Kim Olim’s evaluation of the man, though, was quite generous.

Surprised by her unexpected remark, I opened my eyes wide and asked, “Were you friends?”

“We weren’t friends. However, since we have the same religious interest…”

“Ahhh…”

“He was someone who studied quite hard.”

He was a church acquaintance, so to speak…

Considering how Moon Issak cooperated with us to obtain a holy object in Ahn Hospital, I thought Kim Olim might be right about his personal code. Looking at Jung Garam avoiding Kim Olim's gaze and shaking his head at me, I could get a feel for their respective feelings.

Moon Issak was someone that someone like Kim Olim would positively evaluate, but Jung Garam wouldn't… Furthermore, seeing Seo Dawon's sneer, he wasn't the type to think highly of Moon Issak either. I imagined Moon Issak as someone just as inflexible as Kim Olim, albeit a bit more radical.

But, if I were to encounter Moon Issak unexpectedly… I feel like I'd be doomed… Should I at least imitate Kim Olim? "Excuse me, then… What should we do if Moon Issak discovers me while investigating the case? We could run into each other–he could ask unexpectedly sharp questions."

"You can call on me."

"What if I'm in a situation where I can't call on you guys?"

Perhaps because we'd been in so many absurd coincidences, no one dismissed my words as impossible.

"Well, you have to run," Seo Dawon replied after frowning and contemplating for a brief moment. Jung Garam also chewed on his lips, but had nothing else to add.

"…I-Is that all?" I asked.

"I agree with Seo Dawon," Kim Olim added, though she had a strangely generous assessment of Moon Issak, she shrugged as if nothing could be helped. "I wish I could protect you, but I don't currently have the backing to protect you socially. Just, if you see him, try to avoid Moon Issak as much as possible. And never…be left alone with him."

I swallowed my saliva.

* * *

“Issak-nim.”

“Yes, Da-jung-ssi.”

The secretary turned his head at the sound of Moon Issak calling for him. He was just briefed on the aircraft boarding records just a moment ago. In addition, a separate document was prepared, filled with selected names that should be watched.

“What would you like for lunch? You’ve come all this way to Jeju Island…”

“Ah, I’ll be fasting until tomorrow,” Moon Issak said.

“Aigoo, I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s nothing at all. Then, please have a delicious lunch before returning.”

“Yes, yes…”

Moon Issak, after subduing the secretary of the Jeju Dungeon Association with a restrained smile, read the other documents that lay upon his desk. Then, in the last part, his eyes, which had been hurriedly scanning across the pages, had stopped momentarily.

The names of all the Users who visited the Island during the timeframe of Park Hoseok’s murder was roughly written at the end of the document.

Moon Issak found a name that stood out to him, even as he skimmed through the names–at such a great speed that others would wonder if he processed any of the names at all–that were so packed and small like black sesame seeds on paper. “Choi Lee-kyung…” he muttered unwittingly.

After Moon Issak said that name aloud, he no longer flipped through the documents at such a terrifying speed as he had done before, and he seemed lost in thought. While tapping the name ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ with the tip of his ballpoint pen, he recalled various recent events.

Some time ago, Moon Issak had visited the Ahn Hospital VIP ward for personal reasons. His visit was carried under such secretive conditions; he had not even disclosed it to those closest to him.

However, not long after he checked in, a high-level skill, one that he could not ignore, was activated in front of his door. The skill spewed out huge aura waves as if it were provoking him; they had no intention of hiding themselves.

Eventually, Moon Issak had no choice but to open his door after arming himself. However, contrary to his expectations, a simple invitation was placed on the ground, and no attack welcomed him.

[If you dine at [Tea Banquet], the restaurant on the first floor, at XXday XX o’clock, then we’ll send you the ‘Black Market’ entry ticket that you’ve been searching for.]

When he opened the invitation, there was a request from an anonymous sender accompanied by bait–the promise of the [Black Market] ticket.

Of course, it would be understandable to refuse such a suspicious proposal, but the invitation rustled Moon Issak’s pride. He wanted to know the identity of the cheeky person who would send an invitation–not the entry ticket itself–in such a bold way… So, he accepted the incomparably shady dinner with Bae Jaemin.

At the dinner table, Moon Issak probed at Bae Jaemin, but that punk knew nothing. Furthermore, the other only lengthened the conversation with boring, tiresome remarks. It was clear he was requesting [HaHae]’s official

guild approval as fast as possible. He relentlessly brought forth proposals that Moon Issak had already rejected in the past.

Moon Issak drank several sips of red wine to appease his tongue which wanted to swear at Bae Jaemin. He pretended to be agreeable, recalling that the invitation only asked him to attend the meal and not to follow Bae Jaemin's words.

Perhaps Bae Jaemin grew quite relieved at Moon Issak's attitude; he did something quite unlike himself–being overt rather than subtle. As the meal was about to finish, he, in an unexpected cheesy gesture, took out a small box the size of a pencil case and placed it onto the table.

'This is…'

'Choi Lee-kyung-ssi left this. I was wondering if you could return this to him.'

However, thanks to that, Moon Issak uncovered a new name. So, with a chuckle, he took that box into his arms.

Of course, Moon Issak knew that the item that Bae Jaemin gave him wasn't left behind by this 'Choi Lee-kyung.' Asking to return a lost item was simply an excuse for a bribe.

As expected, when Moon Issak returned and opened the box, it contained a key that could access a particular instant-inventory. [1]

The inventory accessed by this key would probably contain plenty of valuable items and money–it was virtually impossible for the government or the Dungeon Association to track such bribes. Therefore, Moon Issak threw the key into the trash can.

Since Bae Jaemin had no knowledge of the invitation, there probably wasn't much in that inventory space besides general bribes–no information. At the same time, he instinctively realized that the invitation-sender was also playing a trick on the Priest.

'If something happens at Ahn Hospital, report to me straight away.'

Because of that, the next day Moon Issak left Ahn Hospital and issued a new order to his personal assistant. Then, he sent the [Black Market] ticket he had received in exchange for fulfilling his promise to an 'appraiser.' He wanted to find out the ticket's owner.

However, two days later, the appraiser contacted him with incomprehensible details.

'I couldn't find out the owner.'

'What are you saying? You don't even have a name?'

'That's…a name did pop up, but…my search revealed ridiculous results.'

'Ridiculous results?'

'The owner's name is…Jung Garam. Red Lotus's Jung Garam.'

Out of the blue, the name of a three-year deceased person popped up. In the end, the appraiser could only discover that the ticket was genuine and that it must have been owned, at one point, by Jung Garam.

'Bae Jaemin the survivor…and Jung Garam, who died a while ago?'

Moon Issak felt a foreboding premonition after hearing Jung Garam's name.

At that time of the [Red Lotus] incident, he had some speculations that there were unsavory circumstances that led to the failed raid on the [Tower of Command], but he was unable to dig further. There were too many suspects involved and evidence came up clean against them. Those that still made noise about the incident had disappeared without much fanfare.

Moreover, Moon Issak had an extremely bad relationship with the [Red Lotus] guild, so, at the time, he wasn't willing to dig at the case at the risk of personal damage or threat. After all, he wasn't concerned with the cheap deaths of atheists but the revival of his chosen god.

So, he just set the name aside for a while…but vague suspicions began to cross his mind again when the name 'Jung Garam' began to pop up again.

Shortly after receiving this questionable invitation, someone Moon Issak had suspected, [Red Dragon]'s guildmaster Koo Kyungman, had supposedly killed his stepmother and was on the run.

The new guildmaster of [Red Dragon] was his older half brother, Koo Hui-seo.

And Koo Hui-seo…

'He was long-term hospitalized at Ahn Hospital?'

'Yes… At least, that's what the reports from my investigations say.'

Coincidentally, Koo Hui-seo was hospitalized at Ahn Hospital, but his condition had rapidly improved and was able to return home.

TL: Smh, he threw away the inventory key T_T I really wanted to know what was inside.

Also, the laxness of the Red Lotus members really shows here. (Although they probably were more relaxed because they're dead). Moon Issak isn't dumb–we have plenty of hints. We knew that Witches and Item assessment specialists were a thing. Ofc Jung Garam should have realized that his black market ticket could be traced back to him. O.O

Footnotes

1. Think of it as a storage space that you can access with a key. It's a portable inventory (a la video games) that can be shared or given to someone else.

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Furthermore, Koo Hui-seo lost his mother to his half-brother, Koo Kyungman, shortly after coming home to recuperate.

According to testimonies, Koo Kyungman came to visit the mansion, but when he saw Chairwoman Shin, his voice grew louder and louder. At that time, Chairwoman Shin requested to move to another location, worried for Koo Hui-seo's safety.

However, just a few hours later, Koo Kyungman had disappeared and Chairwoman Shin had been murdered–a broken neck in the living room. The police and the Dungeon Association, who were dispatched after receiving the report, hurriedly placed an arrest warrant for Koo Kyungman, but his tracks had gone completely cold. Only Koo Hui-seo had been left behind.

Naturally, an intensive investigation was opened on Koo Hui-seo, the only witness to this incident. Actually, there were often cases where a general investigation couldn't uncover evidence of murder in conflicts between users. So, if the suspect was a User, a User investigator affiliated with the dungeon association would be dispatched. That person could use their skills to piece together the sequence of events.

In particular, Users classed as 'Witches' were mainly used in such investigations; they could see clues to the past through their crystal balls and beads.

However, this time, the Witch's skills didn't work.

‘We can’t tell whether or not Koo Hui-seo is lying with our ability. Chairwoman Shin’s power runs through his blood. It’s very old magic, and Chairwoman Shin, who has far superior ability than I, placed it on him herself.’

‘We can obtain nothing from Chairwoman Shin’s body. It is true that she died from strong force resulting in a broken neck…However, I cannot access the most important parts of her memories that confirm the suspect. It’s as if only that part had been cut out…’

‘There’s no way to find out what happened inside the living room either. Other Users have conducted an investigation, and nothing has come of it. The connection with Chairwoman Shin’s familiar has also been cut off.’

All three Witches, who were known to have a knack for looking into the past, raised their hands in defeat. Koo Hui-seo had also been questioned by the police, but, right in time, a lawyer affiliated with the [Red Dragon] guild came forth and replaced him as spokesperson for the defendant on this case; no accusations could be levied against him.

Eventually, Koo Hui-seo was released. He was the most suspicious suspect, but no evidence had emerged.

‘In any case, it’s obvious…Koo Hui-seo purged them. You know about that guy’s background, right?’

However, despite the lack of evidence, all those investigating the murder were convinced that Koo Hui-seo was the culprit. Eventually, as only Chairwoman Shin and Koo Kyungman disappeared, the one who eventually

consumed and took over the [Red Dragon] guild was the one who benefitted the most from the fallout.

When Koo Hui-seo was released from the grasp of the legal authorities, he disposed of Chairwoman Shin's assets, as if he had been waiting for this chance, and recruited loyal key figures to support his side within the guild. He took control as soon as possible.

Of course, this may have not happened if Koo Kyungman was caught and tried in court, but Koo Kyungman's current situation was quite ambiguous. Furthermore, acquaintances accepted his disappearance without a trace as his death sentence. In lieu of Koo Kyungman's sudden disappearance, Koo Hui-seo became something akin to a new king–his royal mandate proven through the blood that ran through his vessels.

Thus, even those that were Koo Kyungman's limbs–his men–bowed their heads to Koo Hui-seo just a week after their former boss's disappearance. [Red Dragon] quickly recovered within a month, as if Koo Kyungman had never existed.

At that time, Moon Issak judged that Koo Hui-seo used his brain well. If Koo Kyungman's body was found, the guild could not have recovered as easily.

However, Koo Hui-seo had avoided even more intense scrutiny and accusations of murder by somehow evaporating Koo Kyungman's corpse; since his brother was still considered a suspect, Koo Hui-seo, his only remaining family member, could dispose of Koo Kyungman's property at will. In the end, Koo Hui-seo took control over [Red Dragon] quite simply.

Moon Issak was not in charge of the incident, so he heard about these details second-hand. During his meal with Bae Jaemin, though, this case came to mind. So, Moon Issak had started a personal investigation into the name Choi Lee-kyung, his only clue.

However, he found that 'Choi Lee-kyung' was simply the name of an uncommon [Necromancer], a C+ rated User, and someone living outside the Hub's core. On paper, he was just another humble User.

Moon Issak felt like the winds beneath his sails had just escaped; no matter how he looked at it, someone of Choi Lee-kyung's ability could not have sent an invitation to his room. In addition, he had been given another task that required his mental efforts and time, so he had to pause his investigation.

However, when looking through the surveys and flight records associated with Park Hoseok's murder, the name 'Choi Lee-kyung' had caught his eye once again. Moon Issak requested more detailed boarding documents for the Necromancer.

The results were shocking. He had arrived at Jeju Island just a day before Park Hoseok's murder, carrying a pass that Koo Hui-seo had personally issued.

This reeked faintly of rot.

* * *

After a few days, the news coverage of the Jeju Island incident had gradually decreased. There had been no news of the suspect's capture, but, even if the murder was such a shocking incident, people's interests would wane a little after it dominated the headlines for weeks.

The hot topic, 'Which ranker killed Park Hoseok,' which reigned the conversation day by day had also withered with the news that the criminal had probably been part of a team instead of a lone agent.

According to the news, there was a suspicious overflow of skills used near the scene of the crime; a barrier had been erected to block the victim from escaping outside.

My heart galloped whenever new information was reported, but it was indeed true that people's interest in the incident had decreased significantly.

Thus, news-related stress had diminished slightly. To be fair, Bae Jaemin wasn't the one who killed him, and Park Hoseok wasn't very well-known in the first place–he was still a bit unfamiliar to ordinary folks.

So, these days, I started feeling more confident in leaving the house little by little. Starting today, Kim Sangyoon and I would begin dungeoneering again. I needed to level up quickly and summon a new guild member.

In order to cultivate levels as fast as possible, we planned on entering the [Snack House] dungeon, which was a bit more difficult that [Aule's Ghost Ship] and had little merit other than funneling experience to the Users. We planned on monopolizing all of [Snack House]'s monsters since other Users would most likely raid a more efficient dungeon.

Ding Dong–

The only downside to [Snack House] was its location–outside of the hub–and Users needed transportation to access it. But, since we had Kim Sangyoon, that wasn't a problem.

As soon as he heard we needed to clear [Snack House], Kim Sangyoon said he would bring his car to the front of my house and pick me up before I even requested that from him. And, today, about 10 minutes before the scheduled time, the doorbell rang. I had been waiting behind the front door, so I opened it immediately and stepped out.

In front of the house lay Kim Sangyoon's red sports car. Its black-tinted windows rolled down as I approached. Within the car, Kim Sangyoon sat–his hair slicked back–and he wore a tacky, black, brand new combat suit. The Warrior greeted me with a smile.

'B-Burdensome…'

For some reason, his smile was intimidating, so I hugged Lackey tightly within my arms.

[Clack Clack Clack!]

“Hello!” Kim Sangyoon chirped.

“Hi, hi…” I said.

“Why’s he wearing his clothes so tight like that?” Jung Garam bluntly voiced my thoughts before entering the car. I felt somehow embarrassed to look at Kim Sangyoon, so I clamped my mouth shut and opened the passenger seat door.

However, when I sat in the passenger seat, the overwhelming perfume scent almost made me motion sick. Since it was mixed with the scent of air freshener, the smell almost gave me a headache. Does Sangyoon-ssi usually wear perfume like this…? I glanced at him out of the corner of my eye, wondering, but, I have no idea since when he’d been looking at me, we made eye contact.

Kim Sangyoon smiled awkwardly before starting the car; I cautiously lowered the window. Like that, we drove silently for a while.

“Hyung-nim. I…Could I listen to some music?”

“Yes, please be comfortable. I’m alright with it.”

“Thank you!”

[I like Oppa~ Why don’t you don’t you don’t you know my heart~] [1]

“No! This isn’t it…”

A popular idol girl-group song flowed out from the radio; Kim Sangyoon looked visibly embarrassed and tapped at the console screen several times.

The music he turned on after that was similarly noisy and chaotic. Kim Sangyoon wrestled with the radio with a nervous face, but, soon after, a sweet acoustic band song that seemed vaguely familiar began to play. Only then did Kim Sangyoon relax and brighten his expression. It seems he was searching for this song.

By that time, the intense scent had somewhat dissipated, so I leaned my head against the headrest and closed my eyes. Since the journey would take approximately an hour and half by car, I wanted to sleep.

However, Kim Sangyoon engaged me in conversation. “Um, Hyung-nim, am I right in thinking that you use this song for your ringtone?

“What?”

“I-Is this not it…?”

“Ah…”

Is it? I can’t check my ringtone when I’m calling someone else… But, come to think of it, the melody does sound familiar…

“I think so…”

“Do you like the guitar?”

“Mm…Well I don’t dislike it.” I opened my eyes and looked sideways at him, wondering if he was playing that song for me.

Kim Sangyoon mumbled like each of his words were laden with some double entendre, “I..actually, I used to play some classical guitar in the past.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Actually, I was a bit awed and thankful. This was the first song I’d ever practiced…hahaha!” The warrior began to ramble. At first I wondered why he was acting like that, but then I reasoned he probably prepared some topics of conversation so the long car drive wasn’t made awkward.

TL: Moon Issak is so close!! And our hapless protagonists have little idea T_T

Thank you for reading~ For those who haven't, please consider rating on Novel Updates! It really helps!

Footnotes

1. These are lyrics to SNSD's Oh! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhkwOU5cfrU

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So, I was about to say something to overcome the awkward atmosphere…

“Lee-kyung-ah, tell him, ‘So What?'”

“This punk driver…has a lot of useless things to say.”

“Hold it in, noona… We can’t put Lee-kyung-ie on the bus on the way back.”

I laughed awkwardly at the chaos in the back seats and shut my mouth. From what I’ve noticed, the Red Lotus members calmed down when I stopped paying attention to Kim Sangyoon.

Besides, at that time, the seat belt glistening near my face bothered me; I started chewing on it, refraining from speaking any further–not that this conversation needed my input anyway.

“We’ve arrived!” Kim Sangyoon shouted.

“Thank you,” I murmured.

Like that, we arrived at our destination, safe and sound; we could see the swaying, brown dungeon gate.

Other popular dungeons were often noisy because of the many street vendors and restaurants targeting the coming and going Users, but this one

was really quiet. Only one or two people would sometimes pass by the [Cookie House]'s front gate.

"Let's brief ourselves quickly before going in."

"Yep!"

So, we just sat on a weathered bench nearby and shared information–given to me yesterday by Seo Dawon and Kim Olim–about the structure and flow of the dungeon.

"We need to break through as fast as we can until we reach a crossroads…Be careful not to step on or wound the little cookie children," I said.

"Understood."

I explained while looking through my memo notes on my cell phone; My curiosity was triggered as I saw Kim Sangyoon answer confidently with an ambitious expression. These days, Kim Sangyoon was overly ambitious; even now, it seemed as if the Warrior was itching for some action.

However, his bared smile expression didn't look so bad, so, instead of asking questions about his ferocity, I decided to enter after informing him about the [Cookie House] raid's fatal risk factors.

While walking behind Kim Sangyoon, I slowly checked over the battle uniform I wore. This was the combat uniform I bought at such a high price, but I was a little excited. The uniform would finally be showcased today! The dragon skin felt nice, and I was fond of the strange, unfamiliar smell of the leather.

"No, this bastard… Now that I take a closer look, it looks like Lee-kyung-ie and this bastard are wearing a couple uniforms." [1]

"Mm?" As I fiddled with the wrist guard, I heard an angry shout behind me. Jung Garam narrowed his eyes and jutted his chin at the warrior.

Looking closer, Kim Sangyoon's combat uniform was also bought from the DAA, the combat clothing brand that tailored my uniform.

However, hmm…Kim Sangyoon was originally a popular streamer and earned good money; it wouldn't be too outrageous for him to at least be able to afford DAA.

Angered, Jung Garam whispered into my ears, "Doesn't it feel bad to have been copied like this? Should I stab him?"

Is he crazy?

Of course, I shook my head to dissuade him. Does it make sense to say that Kim Sangyoon had followed me? The combat uniform design was ready-made anyway.

Instead of arguing with Jung Garam, I glanced at Kim Sangyoon walking in front. In a low voice, I whispered to the young Assassin, "What kind of combat uniform did you wear in the past?"

"Me?" Jung Garam replied.

"Mhm. What did you wear when you obtained Matara (the title)?"

"Why? Was it cool?"

"Yeah…I searched for something similar, but I couldn't find anything?"

"Cough… Actually, I obtained that after much difficulty…"

Jung Garam's expression suddenly brightened and expended a lot of effort in explaining the origins of his combat suit. At that point, Seo Dawon, who was walking next to me, and I briefly made eye contact; he noticed that my shallow attention span was wandering, but he made no particular moves to point that out.

[Clack Clack.]

And finally, we stood in front of [Cookie House]’s gate. Kim Sangyoon had walked confidently the entire way there; at the entrance, he turned back towards me, and I nodded my head.

[‘Berserker Kim Sangyoon’s party’ will now enter Cookie House. Press the button if you’ve finished preparations.]

[Yes.] [No.]

A familiar system message popped up. I pressed [Yes] immediately; after a while, my vision faded to black.

* * *

[We welcome you to ‘Cookie House.’]

[You can start the event, ‘What are the ingredients for Cookie Dough?’]

Soon afterwards, I felt like my body was being moved someplace else. Even before I opened my eyes, I smelled something savory and sweet– exactly like freshly baked bread or sweets at a bakery.

As I opened my eyes, the system message echoed in my ears; I stood in a small cave covered here and there with crackers. I could also see Kim Sangyoon. The other Red Lotus folks were all standing separately; when they saw me, they hurried to my side.

“We’ve arrived.” Kim Sangyoon equipped [Berserk] and stood in front of me. Lackey, who had been riding in my arms this entire time, jumped down and stood at my side.

Following Kim Sangyoon’s gaze, I could see what appeared to be small bugs slowly approaching us. When we took a closer look, they appeared to be various cereal pieces like Frxxt Loop and CxCo Balls. [2] The cereal bounced against each other, as if it were enticing us to pick them up and pop them in our mouths.

I told Kim Sangyoon, “Those appear to be the cookie children. Should we move to the side so we don’t touch them?”

“Understood.”

[You’ve discovered the Cereal Babies!]

[They would make a hearty breakfast. Of course, if you pick any random thing off the ground and eat it, you may give yourself a stomach ache.]

As soon as we moved out of the way, the system message belatedly and sarcastically conveyed information to us.

I pushed the message out of view, towards the left, and grabbed Lackey’s hand–the skeleton was still looking at the cereal with a curious expression upon its face. Fortunately, Lackey didn’t even protest and docilely stayed put until the Cereal Babies disappeared from view.

“We should now break through to the crossroads.”

“Yes.”

After the Cereal Babies vanished from our sights, we hurried on forward. After walking like that for 20 minutes, a sharply sweet smell poked at our

noses. The scent made me wonder if a large amount of dark chocolate was being boiled somewhere.

[Fon-due, Fon-due.]

When we climbed the bulging cracker hill just outside the cave we exited, I was able to identify the source of that sweet chocolate scent. A huge chocolate river flowed right at the foot of the hill on the other side.

Furthermore, nuts like macadamia, almonds, and walnuts (not crackers) were placed like gravel near the chocolate river. Beside all that, a Golem, which seemed to be covered with melted chocolate, continuously called out [Fon-Due] as it patrolled the surrounding area.

[You've discovered the Fondue Golem!]

[Coated in chocolate; covered in caramel and almonds! Any User that likes chocolate bars would want to eat this monster in one bite. The red eyes on its face are dried raspberries, providing a refreshing taste on its otherwise rich flavor profile. The chocolate stick it's holding is made out of 77% cacao! All ingredients are of the finest quality.]

Of course, even with the Fondue Golem's explanation, I didn't think it looked particularly appetizing. Even at first glance, the golem was enormous–over 3 meters tall–and the chocolate stick it was holding was just as tall as I was. It was just so bizarre to see such a giant walking around shouting [Fondue] periodically.

In addition, the Fondue Golem would grab the Cereal Babies that were jumping around and throw them into the chocolate river. The Cereal Babies didn't seem like they wanted to be caught; they looked a bit pitiful, running away.

The Cereal babies that were narrowly caught within the Fondue Golem's fists struggled like fruit flies. When they were finally thrown into the river, they melted with a screech and, eventually, a silent scream.

After looking at that sight, I looked over the chocolate river once again. With small bubbles rising to the surface and exploding, the river looked almost exactly like magma. The river must be much hotter than it looks.

"There are about 10 in total…Should we start with the nearest one?" Kim Sangyoon asked.

"Yes. I'll try to lure one over." I stroked Lackey's skull and softly instructed, "Lackey-yah, bring one golem over here."

[Clack Clack!]

Flashing its eyes, Lackey walked down the cracker hill, laid flat on the ground, and crawled towards the nearest golem.

[Fon-due, Fon-due.]

Since Lackey was so small and its body was made completely out of bone, it made little noise when it moved. Even the skeleton's habitually clanking jaw was held stable by clenching its teeth on its sword. Thus, Lackey could easily approach the Fondue Golem's back, and, aiming for the Fondue Golem's waist, Lackey grabbed the sword from its mouth and fixed its grip.

Clunk–!

[Fon….]

Lackey's sword dug deeply into the Golem's hip.

It seems that the Fondue Golem wasn't hit as hard as I had hoped; the golem looked down at its stomach and looked at the protruding sword–tip covered in caramel sauce. Then, it straightened its bulky body. Of course, before the golem could turn around, Lackey quickly recovered its sword and retreated.

[—]

The Golem stopped crying out [Fondue] and blinked at Lackey with its dried raspberry eyes. Soon after, it reached out its big hand and tried to grab at the skeleton.

“Dodge it!” I shouted.

TL: Hello, Thanksgiving is coming up so here’s my present before the holidays! (I might be a lil late for the update after the holidays + black friday. I’ve got some work to do >.<)

This is honestly the worst dungeon to translate T_T I just got so hungry thinking of sweets.

Footnotes

1. Couples in Korea, on dates, may wear the same style of clothing to be romantic.
2. Censored Brands in the original as well~

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Lackey barely moved out of the Fondue Golem's reach. However, the Golem succeeded in grabbing the tip of Lackey's blade–the skeleton wasn't successful in moving it out of the way.

Clunk–!

Lackey, along with the sword it held, dangled midair from the golem's tremendous power. It appeared like there was far too much difference in physical strength since Lackey was still in its transformed, low-level skeleton mode.

Moreover, the Fondue Golem not only lifted Lackey but also grabbed the sword; like holding a shot put, the golem began to turn around as if he were readying for launch. In order to not fly off into the chocolate magma, Lackey held onto the sword handle, but its grip was slipping little by little. Perhaps the centrifugal force was too strong.

[Will you change your Servant Lackey's form into 'Skeleton Soldier'?]

"Alright." So, I changed Lackey's form into Skeleton Soldier. Actually, this was the first time I've done this since our practice session right after evolution, but I proceeded, thinking that it may be pushed around less since the skeleton would be much larger.

When I nodded my head, the small skeleton, still holding onto the sword handle, began to simultaneously produce a large amount of purple smoke. It was as if dry ice had been placed inside.

[Transformation into intermediate Skeleton Soldier completed.]

Immediately after the system guide window popped up, the purple smoke immediately enveloped Lackey. At the same time, Fondue Golem stopped its reckless spinning action.

The golem looked unnatural– shoulders twisted–as if the sword was stuck mid-rotation. However, after the thick smoke lifted, the sword blade that the Fondue Golem grasped had disappeared and turned into a sharp lance.

And, grabbing onto the lance handle with one hand, Lackey finally emerged, much larger than before. It wasn't the baby-form that swayed helplessly in the wind, as if it would fly away at any minute; now, it had transformed into what seemed to be a child soldier.

[Clack-Clack-Clack-!]

Whenever Lackey clacked its jaw, purple smoke seeped out and hovered around its mouth before scattering. It felt as if my dog became Cerberos.

"Wow, It looks totally strong now?" Kim Sangyoon, watching the whole incident, stared back at me in admiration. For some reason, I felt proud and emotionally moved at that reaction.

Clank–!

While Lackey's sword had been upgraded into a shiny, silver elongated lance, a shield with a pointed bottom had also formed in Lackey's other hand.

And, as soon as Lackey found the weapon’s center of gravity, it mercilessly hit at the Golem’s wrist that held the end of the lance. The Fondue Golem couldn’t prepare for such a sudden counterattack and, shocked, released the lance tip.

Lackey immediately retreated backwards. It calmly brandished the shield forward; all parts of its body except for the tip of its head were hidden behind the shield.

[Fon—Due!!!]

Lackey’s current appearance seemed to provoke the Fondue Golem.

The Fondue Golem molded a new facial expression with its dried raspberry-embedded face and began to roar. At first, I thought it was simply blinking its round eyes, but it seemed like the golem changed its expression into a pointy angry face (exactly like an angry emoticon on any electronics). The golem started running, footsteps thumping against the ground.

Lackey must have been waiting for this exact moment; the skeleton rushed up right beneath its nose, turned straight around, and began to run back. It did as I said–bringing one golem over to our location.

I almost shed tears–I was so thrilled that Lackey had fulfilled my orders accurately for the first time without any help. Kim Sangyoon’s shout of “Let’s go!” managed to calm me down. Furthermore, in order to target the moment that Lackey would disappear from the Fondue Golem’s sight, we began to look forward, tension rising.

The Red Lotus guys in the back didn’t give much advice today–maybe they were gauging Kim Sangyoon, Lackey, and my team play.

Lackey did better than expected, so now, as its master, I should work hard too. The handle of the dagger slipped in my palm, due to the accumulated sweat from the tension.

‘Please…!’

However, I didn’t showcase any of that tension externally and listened to Lackey’s rapidly approaching footsteps.

Step Step Step–!

Lackey ran quickly towards the cracker hill, where we lay in ambush. As soon as the skeleton saw us in front, it turned around to face the chasing golem.

Before the Fondue Golem could fully bow down, I shouted out the skill Lackey got after it evolved into its intermediary form. “Undead Charging!”

As soon as the skill was activated, the delicate smoke that flowed out of the skeleton’s lance and shield began to creep up and enshroud it. Lackey dropped into a low stance, ready to bounce off at any moment.

And, when the Fondue Golem turned the corner and jumped at Lackey with outstretched hands, Lackey shot out like a bullet and confronted its enemy. Its opponent was twice its size, but [Undead Charging] was the right skill to use against such a big and sluggish enemy.

Crash–!

Although Lackey had grown in size, the Fondue Golem was still 3 meters long; the golem was bound to have the upper hand in physical strength. However, Lackey accelerated a tremendous amount right before impact, and the Fondue Golem bounced off. Furthermore, since the force hit the golem from below, it fell back after receiving a huge shock to its systems.

Boom–!

Due to the nature of the Golem’s shape, it took time for it to stand up again on its own if it were knocked over. Just as Seo Dawon advised, it was usually better to try and knock the Golem over instead of trying to kill it all at once. Of course, the appropriate force applied at the correct angle was needed to tip the Golem on its back, but Lackey did much better than I expected.

“You did well!” I shouted.

“I’m going in!” Kim Sangyoon roared.

I was happy to jump up and down in place, and Kim Sangyoon jumped out from behind me with fierce momentum.

Kim Sangyoon was not as large as the golem but his size was something to be reckoned with, so his running appearance was still quite threatening. Kim Sangyoon was gaining momentum as if he were intending to jump off the cracker hill, and Fondue Golem, still struggling to stand up, had exposed its entire body.

“Buster Blade!” Kim Sangyoon’s [Berserker] carried a large amount of hitherto unseen power.

In the end, the Fondue Golem, who had fallen back and failed to defend properly, suffered critical damage to its nucleus on the front of its body. The dynamic sight of its thick caramel coating, broken almond pieces, and blood-like caramel splashing on Kim Sangyoon’s cheek caught my eye.

[Kaaaaaack!]

[Buster Blade] dug through the chocolate coating and exposed the Golem’s shining [nucleus] core. Though I didn’t separately order Lackey, it raised its lance high and drove it straight through the nucleus’s center.

Bang–!

The [nucleus], the device that allows the Golem to move, was usually carried in a strong outer shell. In short, the [nucleus] was the Golem’s achilles heel.

Lackey hit the [nucleus], located near the center of the golem’s chest, directly with its lance; immediately after, large cracks formed. The Fondue Golem became rigid before bursting, alongside a popping sound that came from its [nucleus]. We’ve properly defeated it.

[You've received a large amount of experience since your servant, 'Lackey' has defeated a Fondue Golem.]

[Your Level has increased!]

[Your Level has increased!]

[Your party member, 'Kim Sangyoon's,' level has increased greatly!]

[You have received almonds for the event 'What are the ingredients for cookie dough?']

I don't think Kim Sangyoon expected for the monster to be killed so quickly; he turned back to look at me with a happy expression. I waved my hands wildly at him, telling him he did well.

* * *

Afterwards, we cleared through the Fondue Golems, one by one, with the same method. Lackey or Kim Sangyoon would draw the Fondue Golem's attention and drag it to the base of the cracker hill; then, the other would ambush and defeat yet another opponent.

In my case, even if I couldn't be in the front lines directly, I still had to control Lackey. I cooperated by watching and barking out instructions. Sometimes, I would look across the hill and watch out for any other Golems that may approach.

"We almost defeated 8 Golems in an hour," Kim Sangyoon remarked.

[Clack clack!]

Kim Sangyoon wiped the sweat off his forehead and admired the hard work; Lackey puffed out its chest, probably proud.

I reached over to pet Lackey–conveying it did well–but paused. A sweet smell was wafting from somewhere; Lackey and Kim Sangyoon had caramel and chocolate splattered all over their bodies… I handed a water bottle to the two of them in order to wipe all that off. “Don’t you feel sticky?”

“It’s better than when I defeated other monsters.”

“I guess…”

[Clack Clack Clack!]

Compared to the bizarre monsters in the [Tower of Command], the monsters here… Could I say they were fairytale-like? Other monsters may have sprayed blood and caused a gory scene, but these were simply full of chocolate sauce. I wasn’t as stressed at this sight.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I’m still sluggish from the break and haven’t TL’d much (either for this or my other projects) but I can’t be slow forever~

Yay Lackey though~ Finally a proper skeleton soldier!

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“The golem population still keeps on increasing. This monster must be able to Respawn (a phenomenon where a monster, after dying, is able to reappear once again after some time has passed)” [1]

“Noona, but those things…aren’t they coming towards Lee-kyung-ie?”

Things didn’t go as smoothly as I thought it would.

We thought we had almost gotten rid of the Fondue Golems, but those monsters began reappearing from the boiling Chocolate river, once again resuming their wandering. Unlike before when the golems travelled alone, they started flocking in groups of three or four.

Moreover, a group of six golems–the largest group we could see–began to slowly approach the cracker hill where I hid.

Even if I tried to retreat down the hill with my back flat against the planes of the ground, it would not take long for me to be caught. Even if I ran with all my might, the area was a vast plain with nowhere to properly hide.

Seeing me struggle, Kim Olim approached me, the stress wrinkles on her forehead pronounced. “If these golems are a respawn-type mob, there’s no particular reason to clear them out. Lackey and Kim Sangyoon wouldn’t be able to deal with 6 of them straight away anyway.”

After checking that Kim Sangyoon was far away, I lowered my voice and asked, “Then? Is it better to run?”

“You probably need to defeat another monster, not those golems, to move on. Since you can’t find it here, it would be better to relocate.”

I glanced towards Seo Dawon and Jung Garam, but they didn’t seem to disagree. So, I beckoned Kim Sangyoon, who stood at a distance from me.

“Yes! Do you need something!” Kim Sangyoon called back.

“Right now, a large number of golems are closing in on us,” I said.

“I think I can handle up to three of them.”

“There’s six of them.”

Kim Sangyoon opened his eyes wide, surprised by the sudden, out-of-the-blue increase in the number of Fondue Golems. Quickly grasping the direness of the situation, he whispered, “Do we need to run away?”

“That would be for the best. Besides, it takes a while for them to respawn.”

“Understood. I’ll lead the way.”

“Yep…”

After responding, Kim Sangyoon immediately took the lead and started moving us away from the Fondue Golems. I followed closely behind–nearly stuck to his back; Lackey kept a watchful eye on our rear.

However, Kim Sangyoon suddenly stopped walking and turned towards me. “I can see some strange monsters in front of us…”

“Strange monsters?” After hearing that, I turned to look in the direction the Warrior pointed out. And there stood a huge…mass of white clouds–as if several individual clouds were moving together.

‘…What on earth is that?’

Under the cloud-like top, there was what seemed like an inverted brown triangle at its base. However, as the monsters were still at a far distance, it was hard to accurately pinpoint its identity or shape.

However, Seo Dawon, who also looked when I did, answered my unvoiced question in a calm voice, “It’s a Soft-cone King.” [2]

“Huh?” As I looked up, doubtful, Seo Dawon reached his large hands towards me and covered my eyes. I was a bit perplexed, but I stayed still. Soon the darkness melted away from my eyes, and, as if I had zoomed in through a telescope, I could see the distant clouds clearly.

The monsters, through this view, really did appear like ‘Soft-Serve Cones.’

The head–including its face–was a twisted white ice cream that looked as if it would melt at any moment; it stood on the brown cone with its pointed end stabbed into the ground. They moved around–jumping and leaping–freely: after kicking up off the ground, the cones would leap to great heights before piercing the ground at another location.

Looking at the sharply drawn eyes, nose, and smiling mouth drawn in chocolate syrup, I decided I never wanted to eat another soft-serve ice cream cone ever again. I tapped Seo Dawon’s hand; I had seen enough. The mage removed his hand.

“Haah…Is it okay to go over there?”

No matter how I looked at it, no vague hypothesis on how to defeat the monster came to mind. Just looking at the size, it appeared twice as big as the Fondue Golems…

I subconsciously looked at Seo Dawon, but I reminded myself that, this time, Kim Sangyoon and I were attempting to raid on our own merits. I swallowed the reflexive question that bubbled up.

“It looks like they are higher level than the Golems,” I sighed.

“Right? Considering its large size…”

[Clack Clack?]

Kim Sangyoon, in the lead, also didn’t look so optimistic as he looked at the new monsters through the telescope that hung around his neck.

At the same time, we recognized that we needed to step towards the [Soft Cone King] to avoid the Fondue Golems. We were now even closer to the Chocolate River; our taste buds grew tired of the sweet and familiar scent even before it could taste the chocolate.

[Co-one.]

[You’ve discovered ‘Soft Cone King.’]

[100% pure milk! It’s the best-selling ice cream in summer. Though the ice cream may be plain, each bite until the last tastes sweet due to the sprinkling of chocolate syrup. The enjoyable chewy yet hard waffle cone is a plus! All ingredients are of the finest quality.]

Eventually–maybe because we stepped foot within the [Soft-cone King]’s domain–we heard the monster’s cry; the system message had manifested belatedly.

Furthermore, we could vividly feel the echo that rippled out from the huge ice cream cone hitting the ground. Chills passed through me; it felt as if a giant dinosaur was passing by.

Fortunately, at least, the [Soft-cone King] never turned around to look at us approaching from behind. Every now and then, the monster jumped randomly near me, leaving holes in the soil, but I didn’t think it could freely change direction due to its structure.

However, the closer we got to the [Soft-cone King], the more vigorously it stamped on the ground, the echoes compounding with the cold atmosphere. Anxiously, we began to crawl on the floor in a prone position. If by any chance we were caught, we would have no solution.

“Are the golems still following us?”

“Gasp, Yes… I mean, don’t mobs usually give up when their targets enter different domains?”

Furthermore, we still had the issue where the Fondue Golems behind us were still ambling towards us. I wondered if they wouldn’t relent until they were right in front of our noses, but the Fondue Golems showed no hesitation in their chase.

Furthermore, as we began to crawl forwards, we encountered another annoying problem: small, squirrel-sized cookies that stepped on our hands or the hems of our clothes.

In the [Cookie House] dungeon, the most important thing to keep in mind is not to step on or break the small automated sweets. So, if they bump into or stick to you, you must move them gently aside… Once set aside, you may think that was it, but some cookies decide to come back. In various ways, this rule was so burdensome.

When I looked back to check on Lackey, I was startled to see the small cookies popping out of its empty eye sockets. The sweets clung to Lackey like eye boogers; I reached out to the skeleton and removed the cookies. When I instructed Lackey to not destroy the small cookies, it seemed that the skeleton had opted to ignore the sweets and allow them to climb all over its body.

[Clack Clack…]

“It’s still following us…We’re not far from that soft-serve ice cream monster though…” Kim Sangyoon, a little ways ahead of me, said, flustered. I too couldn’t think of a proper way forward, so I watched the Fondue Golems approach slowly.

We were stuck in a dilemma–with no knowledge of what to do.

[Co-one!]

Suddenly, the [Soft-cone King], which had previously been looking resolutely forward, began to turn its body and look at us.

Startled, I moved to stand up, but Seo Dawon, who had stayed still until now, pressed on my shoulders. Kim Sangyoon saw that I had remained prone, so he stayed calm as well. Lackey was the same.

[Fon-due!!!]

Behind us, the Fondue Golems roared, as if they were excited.

The cone poured something white and squishy–like giant bird droppings–over the head of the roaring Fondue Golems. With a ‘plop!’ the mysterious white things–soft-serve ice cream?–fell.

“W-What’s going on?” I asked.

“Those two…they don’t seem to have a good relationship,” Kim Sangyoon said.

With a heavy thumping sound, the Soft-cone Kings, hobbling around on their waffle cones as if they were one-legged, began to rush at the Fondue Golems all at once. Like a screw, the ice cream monsters began twisting their heads; at each rotation, more soft-serve ice cream fell over the Golems’ heads.

To be honest, it didn’t seem like a very dangerous attack other than the fact that it might feel cold, but the Fondue Golems seemed to find it threatening. The golems scattered immediately; the first one who got hit by the soft-serve ice cream floundered.

Then soon, right where that golem stood…

Crack–!

A colossal [Soft-cone King] crashed down. The Waffle cone smashed through the Golem’s waist and pierced the ground.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Coupled with the system’s descriptions of the monsters…I wonder if they’re truly edible or, if you eat them, you’ll get food poisoning etc.

Also, I’ve gotten sick! Just a heads up if I’m late with an update!

Footnotes

1. the original uses Regen, but that has a different connotation in English gaming language.
2. Soft-cone = soft serve cone, basically ice cream.

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It didn’t take long for the [Soft-cone Kings] to destroy the 6 [Fondue Golems] with their overwhelming size and aerial bombardment. However, in that time, we somehow hid ourselves amidst the nearby cookie trees; head-on confrontation with that huge monster didn’t have to happen.

After destroying the [Fondue Golems] in no time at all, the [Soft-cone Kings] began jumping around and leisurely playing with each other, as they had been doing before the altercation. Kim Sangyoon and I peered through the trees to catch glimpses of the [Soft-cone Kings] and quickly discussed amongst ourselves on how to break through this encounter.

“We could survive if we pit the monsters in this area against each other, just like before,” Kim Sangyoon spoke first. He raised his telescope, examined the location, before turning his head away. After confirming that each recessed pit contained a half-demolished golem, he spoke with a dark expression, “In return, we won’t get any experience points.”

As Kim Sangyoon had said, all 6 [Fondue Golems] had been smashed, but our experience bar did not change. 1 golem was almost worth 1 level-up, so the 6 golems stolen by the [Soft-cone Kings] were a waste of experience.

In addition, seeing as how the [Fondue Golem] that Kim Sangyoon and I had defeated by combining our powers was defeated in an instant by a single [Soft-cone King], the difficulty of leveling up with these monsters would be quite different.

We were able to lure the [Fondue Golems] away and defeat them one-by-one, but the [Soft-cone Kings] crowded with each other. I couldn’t think of a way to easily lure one away, and, even if we clashed with one alone, it seemed difficult to inflict damage on something that large.

“It’d be impossible to break that cone and topple it over, right?” I asked.

“Won’t it immediately jump in and attack us?”

“Mmm…then maybe we have to jump down onto that ice-cream part…”

“Seeing how the golem that was hit by the soft-serve ice cream couldn’t budge one inch, that doesn’t seem like ordinary ice-cream.”

I sighed deeply and leaned back against a nearby tree. Taking care to avoid Kim Sangyoon’s gaze, I secretly took a glimpse at the expressions on my detestable servants’ faces.

‘Those bastards… They look like they know something but won’t tell me.’

Somehow, I felt that they took joy in this struggle as well.

Of course, unlike Seo Dawon and Jung Garam, Kim Olim stood with a constant vigilant and blunt expression on her face. However, she also did not easily open her mouth either.

‘Is this all for the sake of training…?’

Eventually, I threw away my regrets at the unfairness of this all and looked at the [Soft-cone King] again.

‘…Huh?’

However, one of the monsters in the large herd was acting strangely. Should I describe it as shivering…? It couldn’t stay still and kept trembling before finally jumping in place as it shook its body.

[Kyaa. Kyaa.]

I heard a faint noise as that happened.

I felt that there was something to observe, so I borrowed the telescope that Kim Sangyoon was holding and watched the oddly behaving [Soft-cone King]. Like that, I saw how every time the [Soft-cone King] shook its body, ice cream and small cookies fell off.

Most of the sweets that fell off the ice cream monster's body were the [Cereal Babies] I had seen earlier. The [Soft-cone King] was probably shaking off the mini-cookies that had climbed up onto its body.

I also saw that the expression drawn with chocolate syrup on the soft-serve ice cream's surface had changed to an (X.X) symbol. Puzzled, I realized the monster did not only find the cookies annoying, but, rather, seemed to hate them.

'What's going on…?'

Come to think of it, didn't the [Fondue Golems] also snatch up the [Cereal Babies] in order to throw them into the chocolate river? Considering the relative insignificance of the mini cookies' martial ability, it was strange to see these gigantic monsters making such a fuss over them.

After noting the [Soft-cone King]'s unusual behavior, my eyes caught, out of the corner of my view, a [Cereal Baby] climbing on a branch.

Small [Cereal Babies], the size of a thumb nail, were slowly climbing a roll-wafer tree. When I looked closely, something fluffy like a cotton ball was attached to the cookie's body, so it could climb the tree easily without falling off.

As the [Cereal Baby] passed by, its path subtly changed color. A long, faint trail remained, as if something wet had passed by.

"This mini-cookie… Is there something more to it?"

"Yes?"

“Whether it’s the Fondue Golem or the Soft-cone King, anytime those two see these things, they try to kill the cookies. It seems like those monsters despise these cookies a lot.”

“Eh, is that so?”

At that moment, just as we were speaking, I noticed that a [Cereal Baby] was trying to climb up Lackey’s body through the gaps of its toes. Before I removed the nuisances, I opened Lackey’s [Status Window].

Though it didn’t seem like Lackey was irritated much by the [Cereal Babies] climbing up its body, the skeleton wiggled its skinny toes, feeling the cookies’ ascent.

Now that I think about it, the [Cereal Babies] seemed to cling more to Lackey than to me or Kim Sangyoon. I moved to remove the cookie and moved it to the branch. Then, I realized that sticky caramel sauce was left on Lackey’s feet; I sprayed water to wash it off.

As soon as I washed the skeleton’s feet, the cookie children that had been notably hovering around Lackey scattered away. The cookies’ nature reminded me of a bug.

My gaze followed the scattered [Cereal Babies]; the mini cookies moved slowly, but they roamed lightly on their feet. And, a large number of these cookies began climbing the trees near us.

At first I had thought these trees were simply palm trees, but, in fact, the trunks were made of roll wafers coated in chocolate; the leaves were cookies coated with green tea powder.

The [Cereal Babies] climbed onto one such tree and stayed atop for a long while, making sounds as if someone were walking on freshly fallen snow. The cookies gathered in a very small space, but the tree melted fairly quickly; a hole started to appear. The cookies began slowly digging into the hole they created.

I gently grabbed one of the [Cereal Babies] that had now dug its body in halfway, and, trying not to break it, pulled it out with as little force as possible. And, looking into that hole…

[Crunch Crunch Crunch…]

The [Cereal Babies] that had been bustling and bumping into each other stopped all movement when I looked at them. Goosebumps rose on my skin; I tore my gaze away from the hole.

Then, Seo Dawon, who was watching me, opened his mouth, “Cereal Babies are especially attracted to chocolate and caramel. That’s why they sometimes dig into particularly slow monsters and eat them from the inside out.”

After saying that, Seo Dawon pointed to the six [Fondue Golems] that had been destroyed. I followed his fingertips to the pits created by the [Soft-cone King]’s cones; within, I saw a pile of [Cereal Babies] that I had not noticed before.

The [Cereal Babies] had swarmed onto the now stationary golem, tangled in its various sweets that made up its body. Apparently, they had gathered to eat the half-destroyed corpse. In particular, I could see that the dark chocolate-coated head was already full of small holes.

And we weren’t the only ones looking at the pit full of swarming [Cereal Babies]. I could feel that the [Soft-Cone Kings] were blatantly staring at the pit as well.

They may have just been simple monsters, but the expressions drawn out in chocolate syrup were somehow familiar. I wondered if it was similar to the expression I held when I suddenly found my teacher in our dormitories back when I had attended university.

“Have you found something?–Ack! W-What’s that,” Kim Sangyoon stuttered.

“Mmm… I think the [Cereal Babies] are…considered pests here.”

“No way, the golem…Are they eating the golem?”

“Yes… If the sweet moves too slow, I think they just eat it all up.”

Perhaps Kim Sangyoon was also weak to insect-like beings; even though he wasn’t a dessert, he approached me, fed up with this business, and avoided the nearby [Cereal Babies]. While observing Kim Sangyoon, I had suddenly thought of using this information to get rid of both the [Soft-cone Kings] and the [Fondue Golems].

First of all, I knew that the [Cereal Babies] wouldn’t look for any old scapegoat. So, I began to observe the [Soft-cone King] that had been previously shaking off the cookie nuisances earlier.

At first, I didn’t notice anything different between it and the other members of its herd, but, after scrutinizing it closely, I found that my target’s cone was slightly cracked along the bottom. Chocolate and soft-serve ice cream were slowly leaking out, little by little.

Though the thin crack could not easily be seen with the naked eye, after staying in place for a long while, chocolate syrup naturally flowed out of the cone and stained the ground. The [Cereal Babies] followed that syrup trail and climbed up the [Soft-cone King].

“About our situation…” I explained to Kim Sangyoon what I had seen and began to expand on my hypothesis on how best to easily defeat these monsters.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Lee-kyung is slowly learning how to think through dungeons! (ofc made safe by the Red Lotus guild members). Also, something’s so sinister

about such small things swarming and eating larger monsters D:

Sorry for the late update! I’m also going slower even if I wanted to do a bonus chap this week–it didn’t end up happening bc I’m in crunchtime for finals. As apology, though, I translated a fan comic, which I’ll put into the discord thread for Necromancer Survival.

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Chapter 161

Chapter 161

The combat plan I explained to Kim Sangyoon was as followed:

First, the [Soft-cone Kings] were so huge that, if one approached carelessly, there was a large risk of being crushed like those [Fondue Golems]. We needed to make unexpected attacks, and, for that, we needed something to attract the monsters' attention.

Of course, I had thought about luring some [Fondue Golems] over here, but that would be too dangerous and would take too long a time. So, the plan that came to mind involved taking advantage of the [Soft-cone King]'s wariness of the [Cereal Babies], moving the small cookies over to them to grab their attention.

"Since they detest the mini-cookies so much, even if the [Cereal Babies] are just nearby, they may not notice our approach–too vigilant against the [Cereal Babies]."

"Oh! That seems like a good plan! But…how will you lure the [Cereal Babies] there?"

"Lackey will have to suffer some hardships."

[Clack Clack Clack!]

I felt a little sorry for Lackey, but Lackey's undead body couldn't be eaten by the [Cereal Babies]. I had no choice but to briefly use the skeleton.

Anyone could see that chocolate was a favorite of the [Cereal Babies]. So, after much consideration, I scooped up some chocolate from the nearby river and applied it on the skeleton. The chocolate flowing near the banks–once I touched the flowing river–was not as hot as I had thought. It was simply hot enough that the chocolate couldn't harden.

At first, I was wary of touching the river. Air bubbles rose and slowly burst in the river's center; steam rose from the burst bubbles like a hot spring. However, it seemed like there was a big difference in chocolate temperature depending on the location.

I was worried that Lackey would get hurt from the heat…but I was relieved to see that wasn't the case. I ordered, "Do you want to just…dip yourself in for a little bit before coming out of the river?"

[Clack Clack!]

Like that, Lackey became a chocolate-coated skeleton.

Of course, because of the constant motion around the joints, the chocolate did not harden there so the white bones were exposed, but, except for that, Lackey became a huge chocolate skeleton, sporting a brown, shiny luster. Lackey didn't seem to enjoy this very much, but it didn't express much dissatisfaction. I guess it realized that this was something it needed to do.

"Pffft hahaha! So hilarious!"

[Clack Clack Clack Clack Clack!]

However, Jung Garam, who had been observing us, detestably made fun of the skeleton; Lackey could only fume in silent anger… I immediately punished Jung Garam by stepping on his feet before making Lackey stand still for one moment.

[Kyaaa.]

[Kyaaa.]

As expected, swaths of [Cereal Babies] appeared out of nowhere and climbed atop Lackey's body.

I had no intention of holding onto the bait for a long while; as soon as I saw the [Cereal Babies] climbing atop Lackey's shoulders, I ordered the skeleton to run. Lackey ran, careful to adjust its speed so that the [Cereal Babies] would not fall off.

[Co-one.]

[Co-one.]

The [Soft-Cone Kings], who had not looked our way once, reacted to the vibrations of the skeleton's steps on the cracker floor. They turned their gargantuan bodies to face it.

And soon, the mild-mannered expression painted in chocolate syrup upon their faces distorted terribly. Their reaction denoted how quickly they recognized that something distasteful was coming towards them.

[Coooooone!!]

In human terms, I guess that was akin to an "AGHHHHHH!" scream? Each of the ice creams, which had previously seemed peaceful in their own right, panicked and began backing away from the approaching skeleton.

And, better than I had expected, one [Soft-cone King] was so terrified of the [Cereal Babies] that, in its haste to retreat, lost its balance and fell to the floor.

Crash!

Its inverted triangle shape, its building-like height–the damage it received when it fell must have been quite grave. The sound it made as it fell was extraordinary.

As I hurriedly ran over to the fallen monster, I could see the [Soft-cone King]'s waffle cone was almost fully broken; soft ice cream and chocolate syrup began to bubble out of the bottom.

A fatal injury! I gestured to Kim Sangyoon, who was following behind me.

“[Buster Blade]!” As soon as he saw my signal, Kim Sangyoon raised [Berserker] high into the air and slammed it down.

Maybe the skill’s level had risen; a blue flame I had never seen before wrapped around his sword and created a whirling gust of wind. The [Soft-cone King]’s chocolate syrup expression changed from embarrassment to fear.

Slam–!

Like that, Kim Sangyoon’s [Berserker] broke through the cracks in the waffle cone.

Although the monster was so large that the sword could not fully penetrate it, Kim Sangyoon pulled his sword that had been deeply lodged within the waffle cone. As soon as the sword left the monster’s body, white cream spurted out in a spray before subsiding. Simultaneously, the [Soft-cone King] stopped its struggles.

[Party member ‘Kim Sangyoon’ has defeated the ‘Soft-cone King.’ Large amounts of experience points have been awarded!]

[Your level has increased!]

[Your level has increased!]

[Your level has increased!]

[Your level has increased!]

[Your level has increased!]

[You have received ‘chocolate syrup’ for the event ‘What are the ingredients for cookie dough?’]

* * *

We were able to defeat three more [Soft-cone Kings] in the [Cookie House] dungeon in that manner and were able to end our hunt when we reached the desired level. We hunted for four hours without a break, but I didn't realize, entranced by the rate in which my level had increased.

I actually wanted to hunt more, but, at that moment, Seo Dawon stopped me and told me not to overdo it. On the car ride home, I nervously checked my status window.

Name: Choi Lee-kyung — Lv 100
Class: Intermediate Necromancer

HP – 321,000
MP – 102,040

Title:

Sweeter than candy – Revenge is truly sweet

<The title: 'Sweeter than Candy' can only be obtained by users who, in the pursuit of revenge, inflict irreparable damage on their target without suffering retaliation or damage in return. While using this title, the title's special skill, 'Counter Attack' may activate–doubling the damage from an enemy's physical or magical attack and returning it back at the opponent.>

Greenhorn Adventurer – You've tasted the bitterness of life!

<While using the title 'Greenhorn Adventurer,' movement speed is increased by 5%>

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):

Magic: 680
Magic Control: 3.9%
Movement speed: 22.7% (+5%)

Skill:

– Summon evil spirits
[Summon Vengeful Ghosts: Proficiency 95%, Rank: High rank]
[Summon Sacrificial Offering: Proficiency o.7%, Rank: Lowest rank]

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-Death Mark

After special conditions are met, you can attach a death mark to the enemy. A living enemy marked by death will suffer a significant loss in defense; furthermore, you can gain additional experience points.

-Shinigami's book (new!)

You can summon a soul within one hour after their death and look into the soul's memories.

I checked the level section in my status window.

Finally!!

I also became a User with a 3-digit level.

Fascinated by that number, I took a screenshot of my status window for this landmark moment.

When one pressed the screenshot button, the status window will be captured, converted to an image file, and sent to one's cell phone for

storage. But, because previously my stats were so dismal, I had never used this function before–too scared that others would see it.

In the past, I used to curse at those who would upload their screenshots onto the [Ranking Gods] community, calling them attention seekers… But, now it felt fun to be in that same position. My heart filled with pride… Was this really the same loser Choi Lee-kyung…? Hehehe!

Now that I thought about it, I had never thought I'd really be able to reach level 100. As the difficulties I had faced flashed before my eyes, I, without realizing, got all choked up.

However, this touching moment was short lived–Jung Garam soon interfered, "Haah… It's the first time I've seen such a solutionless status window." [1]

"……"

"All your class skills are for utility? How on earth are we supposed to raise a Necromancer?"

Because I knew that punk Jung Garam spoke without a hint of malice, I felt even more upset.

Honestly, he probably said those words because he was worried about me… After all, he had one of the best classes for melee combat: Assassin…

However, regardless of his intent, his tone was so detestable, that my fist flew before my words. That was to say…I punched the back seat.

"Hyung, why is Choi Lee-kyung like that? No way, did he try to punch *_this_* body?" Of course, Jung Garam was not hit, and the young Assassin maintained his shameless attitude.

"Don't invite violence, Jung Garam. Don't you know how hard sloppy people like Choi Lee-kyung have to work to reach level 100?"

"Of course I don't know. I'm not sloppy."

“……Shut up.” I growled.

“What? Is there something wrong?” However, Kim Sangyoon would see our scuffles as my solitary struggle–a one-man show.

I didn’t want to be seen as someone strange, talking to myself and all, so I narrowly swallowed my boiling anger and kept my mouth shut… My first trembled when I made eye contact with Jung Garam’s wide smile through the rearview mirror.

In addition, Jung Garam ignored Kim Olim, who attempted to stop him, and hugged me from behind, continuing to tease me. “Weak Lee-kyung-ie, be patient with me.”

“……”

I pinched the back of his hand fiercely, but Jung Garam was a man who wouldn’t move even if I punched him with all my strength. He messed around with me until we exited the car.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I’m Back! In the middle of finals and also amidst the DDOS attacks! Since It’s holidays period, I want to get a few bonus chaps in! Rye and Drea, thank you for the Kofi! The bonus chap should be going up in like a few mins!

Footnotes

1. Colloquially, this means future-less. Or that there’s little Jung Garam can do with what he’s been provided.

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Chapter 162

Chapter 162

After escorting me to the front of my residence, Kim Sangyoon asked if I'd like to have lunch with him, but none of the Red Lotus guys seemed to readily agree.

"Let's…eat together next time…" In the end, after some hesitation, I had to refuse him. Fortunately, Kim Sangyoon didn't look too sad, and, with the promise to eat together next time, returned. My conscience was pricked–somehow it felt like he expected my reply. Usually if one person gives another a ride in their car, they probably expected a meal in return.

However…

"Sangyoon-ie is incredibly friendly these days," Seo Dawon muttered.

I thought it was probably for Kim Sangyoon's benefit that I rejected him first… Additionally, since it was time to resurrect a new guild member, I understood why the servants were so hasty–even time spent eating would be a waste.

So, as soon as we entered the house, I thought they would immediately ask to call forth the magic circle straight away…

"….Huh? W-What? You want to eat lunch first? I thought you'd want to settle the contract first…" I said.

"You look like you're starving–why are you in such a hurry?"

“Choi Lee-kyung, if you neglect to eat, you’ll eventually cultivate poor muscle mass.”

“You didn’t go and secretly munch on some monsters, right?”

Everyone, as if they had never entertained another thought, sat me at the table.

With a spoon in hand, I ended up eating lunch, but, if I was going to eat anyway, why did they even send Kim Sangyoon away in the first place…? In any case, I ate quite a delicious lunch in the midst of the three servants’ burdensome watchful gazes.

They didn’t rush me even after I finished my meal, but I didn’t want to drag the situation for no reason. I immediately pulled out a dagger with a blue blade. It was the fourth time I’d done this now, so I’d like to believe my fear had decreased, but…

“Does it hurt that much?” Seo Dawon asked.

“What?” I said.

“You keep on biting your lips.”

Seo Dawon, who had crafted the magic circle with an indifferent expression, made a comment after he turned back to look at me for a moment. I felt slightly embarrassed. Whenever I felt stressed, I’d nibble at my lips until I drew blood; it seemed that, subconsciously, I fell back into that old habit.

To be honest, as a man, I didn’t want to make such a fuss about a scratch, but… Everytime I did this ‘ritual,’ I was brought into someone else’s consciousness, shouldering their hurt. To be honest, rather than adapting to the pain, I felt like each reiteration brought more agony.

Should I say that, as soon as I gripped the dagger with my hand, I felt like all my energy seeped out through the scar on my palm? It felt like the

energy flowed, disappearing into the Magic Circle through my blood; that sensation–that feel of something against my palm–was so unpleasant…

Still, it was honestly embarrassing to show my fear of a mere scar like that. I deliberately relaxed my lips and breathed deeply.

“If you’re too exhausted, do it later,” the mage said.

“No. It’s just…better to summon him faster.”

“……”

I refused–for my own selfish reasons, but, for some reason, Seo Dawon slightly frowned at my answer. However, as I approached the magic circle’s center, Seo Dawon pointedly stared at me before eventually activating the circle.

Layered lines–laced into flowery designs–slowly tinged gold. I stared, captivated, by the lights dancing like fireworks in Seo Dawon’s eyes before lowering my head.

“…..Ngh.” And then, in front of the mage, I cut a line across both palms. At the same time, severe vertigo overtook me. I had to sit down and place my hands against the magic circle anyway, so I ignored how the world spun around me. I just needed to endure for a little bit.

[You have fulfilled the conditions for summoning a vengeful ghost.]

However, after the [system message] that informed the conditions had been fulfilled had popped up, the vertigo did not vanish as it had earlier. Instead, I was overcome by an indescribable pain. The severe headache and dizziness did not subside; my insides wriggled, as if I were seasick.

“Urgh…”

At first, I thought I threw up my recent meal, but…I spat blood out of my mouth instead. As soon as he saw that I threw up blood, Seo Dawon immediately knelt beside me and drew me into his arms.

“Choi Lee-kyung!”

“What happened!?”

“First, take out a potion!”

Lackey, who had been crouching a little ways away from the living room, ran over and hugged me with its skinny arms.

I knew something was wrong, but I couldn’t stop vomiting blood. I felt something–Seo Dawon using some skills on me?–but it was no use.

Rather, whenever Seo Dawon tried to do something, I felt severe pain, and my entire body cramped. He desperately tried to tell me something, but, at that moment, I smelled something fishy from my nose.

“Stop it!”

Simultaneously, I heard Kim Olim cry–a loud roar. No way… was my nose bleeding too? I wanted to raise my hand to block the flow from my nose, but I couldn’t do anything.

However, when I barely managed to raise my eyelids, I thought that Seo Dawon’s face was far too close to mine. Furthermore, the gleam in his eyes was a little terrifying.

Emotionlessly, he said, “We’re going to give up on summoning Woo Ragi. Don’t just endure; press the summon cancel button.”

“Haah…”

“Choi Lee-kyung, do you hear me? Lee-kyung-ah…”

[Replaying the memory of the deceased: ‘Woo Ragi.’]

However, Seo Dawon’s voice seemed to grow more and more distant; at some point, I could no longer hear him. Simultaneously, my view of the clearly visible living room cut off, as if someone had turned off the light.

It was then that my stomach, which had been continuously vomiting blood, finally settled. The suffocating pain subsided in an instant. It felt like I had swallowed some painkillers and, finally, fell into deep sleep.

* * *

“……Choi Lee-kyung, no way, are you sleeping?” Someone called to me, cautiously. I felt a delicate patting on my back.

Opening my eyes, I reflexively jumped up from my seat. I stood up with such force, the textbooks and ballpoint pens on the desk fell, clattering, to the floor.

“If you’re feeling sick, go to the infirmary. Don’t lie down and pretend as if you’re attending class.”

… Infirmary? Class?

Unable to understand what was happening, I looked blankly around at my surroundings. My homeroom teacher from my 3rd year of highschool stared back at me, clicking her tongue [1].

Hushed giggling noises; indifferent gazes glancing at me for a moment before falling away. The homeroom teacher continued class, as if she hadn’t been interrupted, explaining concepts on the electronic blackboard.

And then, a familiar voice whispered from behind, “Why did you suddenly stand up from your seat?”

“You…”

As soon as I turned around, I was struck speechless, bewildered. ‘Seo Dawon’, smiling playfully and tilting his head…was wearing a school uniform. The same uniform as me.

“You…what are you… No, but here…”

“Hey, look forward. Homeroom Teach is glaring at me too.”

“…..What?” I corrected my posture and started listening to the lesson again, but my confusion didn’t go away.

Something absurd just happened; what on earth was this bizarre reality? I had definitely been in my living room, atop a magic circle, about to summon Woo Ragi. However, after cutting my palms, I had no memory of how I ended up back in high school.

‘Furthermore, Seo Dawon is sitting behind me?’

I didn’t go to the same highschool as Seo Dawon. Seo Dawon wasn’t the one who sat behind me…

‘Huh……? Who was it that sat behind me?’

However, no matter how much I traced my memory… I could remember the face of my former classmate that sat behind me, but I couldn’t recall his name. It was as if that knowledge had been blocked.

Soon, though, the bell rang, signaling the end of class. Seo Dawon naturally stood up, sat on my desk, and played games on my cell phone. Too naturally. He didn’t turn to look at me, but it was as if he had done this for at least one year.

“Seo Dawon.”

“Yeah,” Seo Dawon responded, but he still didn’t look my way. Looking at that cheeky attitude, he was unmistakably Seo Dawon. Furthermore–now that I took a closer look–his face looked a little younger, and his voice was higher than usual… I felt uneasy; it really did feel like the mage’s younger self.

So, I was struck speechless for a while; Seo Dawon unglued his eyes from the cell phone screen and turned to look at me. When faced directly with not his red eyes but more auburn irises, the words died in my throat. Was that the color of his eyes before he died…?

“Why’d you stop speaking?”

“N-nothing… Anyway, you. Are you also in the Vengeful Ghost memory too?” I soon returned to my senses and asked the other. I had thought he might have intervened and changed something.

However, Seo Dawon made a subtly strange expression and responded, “What?”

“I asked if you also entered the Vengeful Ghost memory playback.”

“What’s that?”

“……Huh?”

When I opened my eyes wide at his absurd words, Seo Dawon frowned and placed his hand on my forehead. It was as if he was checking me for a fever.

“Are you really sick? You’ve been saying weird things since morning.”

“No, I’m not saying anything weird…”

“You’re boiling up.” Then, he dragged me along by the arm with brutal force and took me to the nurse’s office. At the very least, he had wanted me to take a fever reducer.

TL: The angst! Summoning these ghosts is truly putting a toll on Lee-kyung. I saw a fancomic depiction of this scene a while back, which made me want to read this novel! What do you think is going on? Why is he back in high school?

Footnotes

1. For now, I've made her a woman, but there are no gendered pronouns here, as is common for most Korean texts.

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Chapter 163

Chapter 163

After being dragged to the nurse's office, a sign on the door stated that the nurse was away.

However, Seo Dawon, as if it was nothing, entered the infirmary by pressing the password onto the door lock attached to the office and stepped inside. I felt like I had seen that relentless drive before, but that thought didn't last long. It was scattered by the strength of Seo Dawon's grip.

Seo Dawon pulled me into the desolate infirmary. Simultaneously, the door closed behind us; I could hear the sound of the door locking.

"W-What? Why'd you lock the door…" I said.

"We snuck in here. Why would I leave it open?" Seo Dawon brazenly said as he led me to one of the two cots in the room.

I was dumbfounded–how could he say that so calmly after breaking in in the first place–but, when I saw him willfully rummaging around the cabinets and retrieving a pain reliever and a cup of water from the water purifier, the words died in my throat. Furthermore, the water he brought me was perfectly lukewarm, and I felt too ashamed to cold-heartedly rebuke him.

The Seo Dawon within this [Vengeful Ghost memory] was a bit weird, but, in some ways, he was similar to the real Seo Dawon. The Seo Dawon in reality would also take care to regulate the temperature of the water he

brought me for meals because he knew I wasn't fond of drinking cold water…

"Hey, Are you joking with me…" Eventually, swallowing a deep sigh, I lowered the cup and looked at him standing in front of me. Seo Dawon was still making a strange face, so I felt a little frustrated. Honestly, why of all times would he be playing around now…?

"Was Woo Ragi summoned? And where are we…" I asked.

"Woo Ragi?"

"Yeah."

"What's that?"

"What?! He's your friend…"

"My friend?" However, Seo Dawon's reactions were too strange to be passed off as a joke.

Any other business may be different, but would he act this way during a [Vengeful Ghost Summon]? As soon as I thought that, Seo Dawon's expression that seemed to say he had never heard of Woo Ragi's name before didn't feel like an act.

I had a strong feeling that something went wrong; I wet my lips, suddenly anxious, and tried to continue talking. However, before I could spit out my words, Seo Dawon approached me first.

And, our lips met.

"W-What…!" I pulled my head back quickly due to the sudden contact, but Seo Dawon didn't seem to particularly mind.

Rather, he pulled my arm towards him and made me lean closer into his embrace. My heart beat like crazy at his unexpected touch; my eyes trembled.

Seo Dawon, though, simply looked down at me and said, “Are you going to keep talking about weird things?”

“What…?”

“What made you so upset again today?”

I couldn’t understand what Seo Dawon was saying; I looked up at the other man. Instead of patiently explaining anything, he licked my lips again. His touch was overwhelmingly lascivcious. Seo Dawon’s lips did not stop there; they trailed down to my rigid neck, pressing down on the fluttering pulse underneath the skin.

Startled, I pushed him away, but he cleverly avoided me. So, instead of maintaining distance, I ended up being drawn closer into his embrace.

Seo Dawon massaged my wrinkled forehead with his thumb. In that way, he continued to fondle my face.

It was just as if we were dating.

This skinship was far too intimate. The Seo Dawon back in reality had never touched me in this manner. Bewildered and slightly embarrassed, the inexplicable palpitations I felt confused my mind.

Meanwhile, Seo Dawon grabbed my weakly shaking arms and burst into laughter. It was completely different from how, in reality, coldness and contempt underlined his smiles. If…all that betrayal had never happened… Was that why the past Seo Dawon could laugh like this…?

Shocked by the unfamiliar appearance, I shut my mouth; Seo Dawon hugged me tightly, as if he were a clamp. Then, in a kind voice that firmly staked its position and refused to be shoved off, he whispered, “What friends do I have? Who was the one who said I shouldn’t make friends and should, instead, play with him?”

I couldn’t help but instinctively respond because he kept looking at me. “I-I did?”

“You kept on crying about how jealous you were. Are you testing me again?”

Of course, I’d never said something like that. Unless they were shot in the head, a grown man would never say something like that. However, instead of answering me, Seo Dawon messed with my hair. It was as if he were soothing me–trying to convince me to relieve my anger and stop complaining.

I found him so cheeky, so I opened my mouth to try and tell him to stop his nonsense. However, just before I could spit my words out, a strange headache pressed down on my brain, and I shut my mouth.

Ding Dong–

Simultaneously, the school bell rang, announcing that break time had ended. Seo Dawon brightly removed himself from me, and I hastened to keep my gaze on him. It was at that moment I thought I needed to ask him for a proper explanation.

However, when he saw me hesitating, Seo Dawon grumpily muttered, “Do you want to stay here forever?”

The gleam in his eyes told me he would jump on top of my body if I nodded. I hurried to stand up; Seo Dawon grabbed my hand as I staggered. He didn’t release that hand, claiming he was supporting me, until we reached the classroom door.

* * *

‘I was fooled again…damn.’

Seo Dawon’s lie was immediately revealed during the next break. Every break, Seo Dawon was surrounded by his friends from other classes, casually chatting and playing around.

‘No friends? Bullshit…’

Furthermore, a slim and pretty girl perched on Seo Dawon’s desk, giggling as she watched Seo Dawon play a game on his cell phone. Anyone could see that she was trying to flirt with Seo Dawon.

The girl sitting next to me at our conjoined desk was also a cute, short-haired girl; she continued to talk with Seo Dawon only. It wasn’t just girls, this tall, delinquent-looking guy was–though I had no idea what he found funny–busy laughing at whatever Seo Dawon said.

I turned my head and slightly glared at Seo Dawon, sitting in the center of that noisy crowd. At that moment, Seo Dawon looked up. I had no idea that we would lock gazes, so I froze; Seo Dawon, after briefly pausing, soon smiled deeply.

In a hurry, I turned my head forward and, as if I were pretending to sleep, leaned over my desk. Contrary to my expectations, Seo Dawon didn’t bother me nor engage me in conversation. Though I was relieved, I felt a bit unhappy.

While my emotions were fluctuating, someone in the crowd spoke with a loud voice, “The lunch for today is damn gross. Should we eat off campus?”

“Myung Il-gak, Let’s go?”

“Go???”

I didn’t want to eavesdrop, but I could hear everything the swarm of people surrounding Seo Dawon said, even if I was slumped over on my desk. It seemed that eating out was already a foregone conclusion; everyone was already choosing what they wanted to eat from the menu.

I slightly chewed my lower lip, paying attention to the throng behind me. Soon enough, though, a clear voice cut through the noise.

“You guys eat by yourself,” Seo Dawon said.

“Why? They have Grilled Atka Mackerel today though…?” [1]

“There’s someone I’d like to eat with.”

“Who?”

I shrugged my shoulders, hiding my neck, thinking, ‘There’s no way,’ but Seo Dawon replied straight away with no hesitation, “Or, do you also want to eat out?”

Then, he lightly tapped my back with his fingertips. I tried to ignore him, but soon I could hear the chair dragging against the floor. I could sense Seo Dawon standing by my side.

Faced with no choice, I raised my head; this unfamiliar Seo Dawon was sitting in front of me.

After he saw me startle, he asked once again, “You want to eat out?”

“……Not really.”

“Alright,” Seo Dawon simply responded, playing mobile games on his phone once again. Of course, I couldn’t be as nonchalant as him. I didn’t dare look behind because, somehow, I could feel hateful gazes trained on my back.

However, I couldn’t back down either. Obviously, I aimed to enter someone’s memories to summon Woo Ragi, but, suddenly, a fabricated version of my school days was playing out in front of me.

Furthermore, I was sure that this bizarre occurrence must have something to do with Seo Dawon. Therefore, even though I felt my cheeks flush, I looked straight at Seo Dawon’s forehead and continued to speak, “Let’s eat…just the two of us.”

“……”

I swear I had no other ulterior motives. I just wanted no other hindrances around so I could fully grasp this strange phenomenon… However, the

conveyed nuance seemed to paint me as a spoiled child.

But, I couldn’t have expected Seo Dawon’s reaction. The guy turned his head almost immediately. The game that he had been focusing so much on was ignored–a [Game Over] stamped on his screen.

“Shall we?” Seo Dawon said.

I found his happy smile so unfamiliar.

TL: Hi guys! Quick chapter before I’m drowning in finals! Sorry I’m posting slow, but for this 1.5-2 weeks, I’ll be fairly busy!

Footnotes

1.

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Chapter 164

Chapter 164

In the end, Seo Dawon and I went to the restaurant in the second floor auditorium by ourselves with the bread we bought at the school canteen. Because I wanted to converse without the prying eyes of others, I was reluctant to visit the crowded cafeteria.

Moreover, for some reason, there were so many people who knew Seo Dawon. Even when we went down to the first floor to pick up lunch, I felt burdened because there were too many people speaking to us. It’s been a while since I graduated from high school; fortunately, though, our lunch was spent quietly since we were able to escape the crowd.

Seo Dawon followed me docilely without making a fuss. However, whenever we made eye contact, I felt embarrassed since his smiling face was so unfamiliar.

“Listen to me while you eat.”

“Alright.”

After arriving at the auditorium, I dragged Seo Dawon to the corner. There were piles of green, shiny sports mats; Seo Dawon and I sat on top of them.

I continued with what I wanted to say as soon as I saw Seo Dawon tooka large bite of his melon bread. [1] Additionally, I wanted him to take me seriously, so I hardened my expression and lowered my tone as much as

possible. “No matter what you may think, we’re not in reality–we’re in someone else’s memory…”

Seo Dawon paused while drinking his milk and looked at me; he didn’t attack me or anything though. I made direct eye contact with him and asked him a question, “Do you know what a [Vengeful Ghost Memory] is?”

“Hmmm…Nope.”

“So, to put it simply, it’s similar to a dreamscape. Also, reality exists elsewhere. It may be hard for you to understand right now, but we’re in your friend Woo Ragi’s memories…In any case, the important thing is that we’re not in reality now. You were never classmates with me in high school! We’re…We met for the first time in a Dungeon. Our hometowns were also different.”

“……”

Once I began talking, I began explaining the situation to Seo Dawon in earnest.

However, in order to explain the [Vengeful Ghost Memory], I inevitably had to talk about the betrayal and death that Seo Dawon had suffered. I couldn’t explain this situation without that context.

I carefully brought that story up and observed Seo Dawon, whose eyes were gleaming as if he had just heard something interesting, but, other than that, there was no change in his complexion. Of course, I had expected this reaction, but it was still a big shock that Seo Dawon didn’t react at all to my words.

Eventually, Seo Dawon acted as if he was listening to some other poor sod’s life story until the end of my explanation. I added a few vaguely sharp retorts at the mage throughout the story, but, for the most part, his eyes were narrowed, measuring me (with a face that plainly stated he thought I was playing a joke). It was obvious that Seo Dawon didn’t listen to me sincerely.

At the very least, he wasn't making sarcastic remarks–maybe because of my desperate tone–but…Hopeless, I grabbed onto Seo Dawon's shoulders and continued my ardent explanation. "…Fine. Then let's move past the parts that are hard to understand. Instead, was there anything that made you feel off recently?"

"No."

He answered without even a second's worth of hesitation. If Seo Dawon weren't a masterclass actor, the 'Seo Dawon' in front of me 'now' really had no memory of all this.

Speechless, my mouth clamped shut and I fell into contemplation. It was the first time the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] had ever played out like this. This was very different from the previous contracts and, still, I couldn't see hide nor tail of Woo Ragi.

Did the system intervene?

Or maybe this was 'Woo Ragi's' intervention?

Of course, either way, there must be some reason that I was being shown a scene like this. Furthermore, there must be some way to exit this memory. I could vaguely predict that if I continued until the end of the 'scene' or if I found some serious loophole, the memory would be broken, and the underlying truth would be revealed.

'A loophole…'

After thinking that far, I fixed my gaze on Seo Dawon who was blatantly staring right back.

'As expected, the core of this memory must be 'Seo Dawon.'"

That fact was obvious from a shallow glance at this strange situation. The school uniform, even the structure of the school building was consistent with my high school experience, but I swore Seo Dawon was never a part of that stage in my life.

Seo Dawon even acted like he was dating me in this memory; if I were to try and find something that didn't fit, I could find discrepancies almost immediately. Should I say this memory was like a distortion of my high school experience?

'Therefore… I'm almost certain Seo Dawon is some kind of a hint…'

Then, what on earth could that hint be pointing me to?

He didn't react at all to my provocations about [Red Lotus] or the [contract]; I needed to provoke him in a different way, but nothing came to mind.

However, Seo Dawon suddenly talked to me who was still lost in thought. "What's with you? Why are you so serious?"

It was as if he were asking, 'Until when will you continue this joke?'

'…This bastard, he was totally listening half-heartedly, wasn't he?'

Furiously, I responded immediately, "I'm not joking!"

"Who said you were?"

"Did you listen to me sincerely?"

"Honestly…this is a bit hard for me to take seriously."

"Haah…."

That punk didn't hide that he had no idea what was going on from the very beginning. I swallowed my ensuing words because I didn't have the energy to argue further.

However, Seo Dawon didn't stop there and asked, "Did you fall asleep while playing games?"

"It's not like that…! Hey, watch carefully." Frustrated, I went to my last resort–using a skill. As expected, one's actions are worth more than a

thousand words.

“……Huh?” However, suddenly I couldn’t think of the activation keywords for the [skill]; it was as if my head was emptied. So, I tried to manifest my stat window, but the window, which had usually appeared automatically as soon as I thought about it, remained absent no matter how hard I tried.

“W-What… Status Window!” I shouted.

“Hmm.”

“Why… Why isn’t it working…” I shouted–desperate, like I had been driven into a corner–but nothing changed.

For me who thought of my skills as a steady last resort, this failure was like a bolt from the blue. Shock silenced me.

Seo Dawon stared a bit before speaking, “Is your ESP not working?”

I could hear the amusement buried in his question. Though I had not recovered from the shock, I still reflexively responded, “It’s not ESP; it’s a skill…”

“Same thing.”

Hearing those words, I stood up abruptly. Those words–it was like… It sounded like [skills] didn’t exist in this world. Anxious, I pointed at him, nitpicking, “……No way. You don’t know what a [User] is, do you?”

“Yeah. Actually, I couldn’t understand you starting from your story about dungeons.”

His answer threw me into despair.

* * *

From the end of lunch to my last class, my soul had left my body.

Within this fabricated memory, Dungeons, Users, nor Monsters existed. It was like the world before dungeons had ever appeared.

After seeing how pale I was, Seo Dawon asked if I wanted to leave class early and visit the hospital. His face conveyed pure worry, but the more affectionate he acted, the more hopeless I became.

'…When can I escape this memory?'

At first, I was confident that escaping wouldn't be too difficult, but… Now, I could see no possible exit.

'Should I trust the Seo Dawon on the outside?…Then, what should I do until Seo Dawon wakes me up?'

And, more than my safety, if I couldn't find 'Woo Ragi,' then this'll be a setback.

The [Essence of a Vengeful Ghost] was a consumable item. In other words, even if Seo Dawon saves me from outside this memory, if I fail to summon 'Woo Ragi' at this time, I won't be able to summon him ever again. Either way, the situation wasn't good.

"You haven't said a word all day long," Seo Dawon said.

"……"

"You're really not going to the hospital?"

"…Not going."

I finished attending my classes, drowning in worry; Seo Dawon, who had been trying to make small talk with me all day, naturally walked by my side on our way home from school. He once again brought up the idea of visiting the hospital.

I answered absent-mindedly, still nervous about the change in this world's paradigm–the absence of [skills]. Even if I went to a hospital now and got tested, I would be diagnosed with delusions. Even without seeing a doctor, that was the obvious result.

However, Seo Dawon did not let things pass by this time; he pulled my shoulder so I faced him, paying no attention to the wandering eyes of other passing students.

Even though I knew this wasn't real…Everything felt so realistic. Even the feel of the passersby's gazes and the mysterious fragrance that wafted from Seo Dawon as he leaned closer towards me.

Eventually, I shouted, face completely red. "Why are you like this all of a sudden!"

"You seemed upset that I didn't believe you."

"I'm not!" I tried to explain there was something more serious afoot, but I just swallowed my words. Seo Dawon looked down at me with an ambiguous look when I ceased explaining.

TL: Seo Dawon is reacting well to his BF being absolutely bonkers at him.

Footnotes

1.

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Chapter 165

Chapter 165

“There’s one thing I can’t understand even if we take everything you said as truth…” He lowered his voice and whispered into my ear.

“What?”

“That means that everything about me is faked. You said I didn’t exist during your highschool days.”

“That’s…right?”

“Then, normally in cases like this, won’t you be able to return to your original world after you kill me? It’s like that in the movies.”

“…What did you say?” Surprised, I looked at Seo Dawon. He calmly met my gaze; he didn’t even chuckle at my wide open eyes.

You don’t believe me at all, but you’d calmly discuss the possibility of your death being the key to end this memory…? Flustered and scared, I stopped walking and scrutinized Seo Dawon. “Are you asking me to kill you?”

“You said this is all a dream anyway. I’m speaking from your perspective.”

“You don’t believe me though.”

“In any case, you just want to ‘wake up,’ right?”

How could he say such things so placidly? Simultaneously, though, I began to problematically think that Seo Dawon's words were somewhat valid. After all, this place definitely isn't reality.

But…

"…Enough. It's still… We don't even know if killing you will wake me from this memory anyway." The more I looked at Seo Dawon, the more I thought I couldn't harm him willingly. I superimposed the future Seo Dawon onto him.

Furthermore, Seo Dawon–judging from his teasing smile–must have gleaned something from my soft and vague answer.

Seeing that face, I impulsively asked, "If you were in my situation… Would you kill me?"

"Nope." Seo Dawon answered before I could even finish my question. And, casually, he continued, "I would simply try jumping from the roof. Usually, they say the sensation of falling helps to wake you up."

"……"

I showed him an expression that conveyed how tired I was of him. Seo Dawon stared at me as if he was looking through my facade and smiled quietly when I didn't resume walking. Then, he murmured, as if he intended for me to hear him, "What a relief. I would have taken you immediately to the hospital if you suddenly insisted on jumping."

"…Haah."

Either way–killing Seo Dawon or jumping to my death to wake from this memory–would require me to muster up some courage. If I had to choose one from those two choices…I guess I would jump.

Honestly, since I knew I was within a [Vengeful Ghost Memory], I wasn't scared of death, but I would have to brace myself for a world of pain… It wasn't easy to parrot empty words about preparing myself for the

pain of a shattered body. However, Seo Dawon didn’t seem to realize that I hesitated due to the promise of pain rather than being afraid of death.

Of course, Seo Dawon would not have mentioned this method because he truly wanted me to jump off a high place. From his point of view, he was seeing someone he thought normal loudly proclaiming that this world was all faked. He must be trying to observe my reactions while pretending to agree with me…

So, I shook my head and walked ahead instead of arguing the point further. I didn’t want to reveal my complicated feelings evident in my expression. Seo Dawon tranquilly followed behind.

* * *

“Lee-kyung-ah. Let’s go eat something.”

Not long afterwards, Seo Dawon suddenly dragged me away, claiming he was hungry. I contemplated what to do, but I nodded–it would be best to stay by his side anyway.

After a short while, we arrived at another familiar place: a snack/fast food place near school. [1] As soon as I entered, I ordered the knife-cut noodles [2] I had once liked; I felt strange since, fascinatingly, the noodles tasted exactly the same. I remember being so disappointed that this shop had transformed into a cell phone vendor before I graduated from high school.

‘Then, would I be 18 years old now?’

When I thought that, I looked down at my hand. I realized belatedly that I couldn’t see the scar I had obtained during my military draft.

Seeing bare skin reminded me of a novel I had read back when I had deeply regretted choosing the Necromancer class. In the novel, the protagonist experienced a regression after death; the main character was so delighted to see his younger body, saying that a new opportunity had arrived.

‘If only I could also turn back time like what I’m reading…’ I had thought.

Now that I’m in a similar situation, though, I feel rather at a loss. The only good that’s come of this experience is that I’m able to vividly see Seo Dawon’s younger face…

‘I have such carefree thoughts now.’

I kept glancing at Seo Dawon in front of me, conscious of his presence. Of course, as soon as I realized those subconscious actions, I was a bit embarrassed. Should I say that I kept comparing the boy in front of me to the man I knew? The present Seo Dawon rarely ate in front of me, so it was somewhat strange and fascinating to watch him eat.

“What are you staring at?”

“……”

With how blatantly I stared at him, there’s no way Seo Dawon didn’t know the answer to his own question.

Why on earth was he pretending otherwise… While I stood, flustered, Seo Dawon gave smiles at the passing high school students–as if he was already familiar with the faces I’d make and had no need to look at me.

“Do you want to come over today?” Seo Dawon asked.

“Where?”

“My house.”

Because there seemed to be some insidious nuance laden in the words, ‘my house,’ I shook my head fiercely. I’d feel a lot of shame if I was swept away by his flow and did something with him. In the end, this place was all faked–how should I face the Seo Dawon back in reality?

However, Seo Dawon did not back down easily. “You have nothing to do, though.”

“I have a lot? You’re the one who has nothing to do.”

“You’re playing hard to get… Then, should we go to your house?”

“You want to be with me that much?”

“Isn’t that obvious?” He acted as if he had no shame.

His unexpected words landed a clean blow on me; my face flushed with warmth. The Seo Dawon who openly declared his affections for me without hiding anything made me strangely bashful. Even though I knew that this was simply a fabricated memory–he was not like this in reality–but…

However, before I responded, I blinked while looking at Seo Dawon; I saw something off on the inside of his hand during our conversation. “W-Wait a minute…Stretch out your hand.”

“Why?”

“Show me your palms.”

Seo Dawon paused momentarily, but soon unfurled his hands. And, on his palm, were ten cross-shaped scars–similar to the cuts I made on my own palm with the dagger.

“How come…”

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Where did you get this scar?”

“What do you mean, ‘scar’?”

However, it seemed as if Seo Dawon was ignorant of the scars engraved onto his palm.

“It’s right there!” Frustrated, I even groped at the healed wounds with my fingertips.

The other simply closed his mouth, opening and closing his fist a couple of times. “I’ve never hurt my hands though?”

I could see that Seo Dawon wasn’t joking with me through his sincere expression. It really seemed like only I could see this scar. Furthermore, suspiciously, the scar looked similar to the wounds I inflicted upon my own hands.

Why would the wounds incurred during the [Vengeful Ghost Summoning] appear on Seo Dawon’s palm?

‘No way, Seo Dawon must be…’

But, before I could think deeper on the issue, I suddenly heard an alarm from both my and Seo Dawon’s cell phone. Simultaneously, the small TV screen in the snack shop cut its broadcast with a [No Signal] display.

“Oh my, what’s going on?”

“What’s with this?”

“Hey, I just received a disaster PSA.”

Suddenly, the store owner and the customers alike began to chatter.

Weeeee-woooo–

Then, I began to hear a faint siren sound from outside the store. I had heard this kind of racket often during military defense training, but, unlike training, the siren continued without end. An ominous feeling washed over me.

"……L-Look at that!"

All the anxious customers rose from their seats. Seo Dawon and I also froze, staring out the store window.

One man pointed at something outside. This eatery was located at the corner of a large intersection; the front and sides were built with transparent glass, so anyone could see far out with no hindrances.

Therefore, when my gaze followed the man's pointed finger, I could clearly see to the far along the road. At the end, thick, black smoke rose into the air.

'Is that a fire?'

However, as soon as he saw the smoke rising, Seo Dawon mumbled to himself. "Why aren't there any cars driving along the road?"

Come to think of it, I couldn't see a single car in the intersection.

TL: I feel like I'm getting whiplash from "Omg it's so sweet" to "What on earth is going on?????"

Also, Today is finally the last day of my finals! I'll be able to start TL'ing again after giving myself a break/relaxation time. I'll probably be back to full capacity after Christmas!

Footnotes

1. is translated as a snack shop, but they sell things like spicy rice cakes, ramen, kimbap, fried food etc. It's more weighty than western snacks, but not 'weighty' enough to be considered a restaurant meal.

2. INSERT PICTURE OF KALGUKSU

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Chapter 166

Chapter 166

It was at that moment.

Boom–!

“Kyaaah!”

“W-What! What’s going on!”

Suddenly, as if an earthquake erupted, the ground started to rumble.

Everyone within the shop began to scream loudly, collapsing where they stood. I was also shocked and stood awkwardly; Seo Dawon dragged me to him as soon as I stumbled. “Are you alright?”

“Y-yeah…”

However, the foreboding crashing sounds from afar did not stop.

In addition, the black smoke which had only been a thin tendril, became a thick stem in an instant. I now realized that the sky was turning black, as if ashes were floating into the air.

Something strange was happening.

I couldn’t shake the thought that this strange phenomenon was another omen originating from the [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. Simultaneously, I

thought we may be in danger soon. So, I turned back towards Seo Dawn and tried to shout at him, “Seo Dawon, let’s get out of here…!”

Swishhh–

Crash–!

“Aaarghhh!”

“Kyaaaah!”

“Save me!”

However, just before I could finish speaking, the building suffered a shocking impact. The lights in the store went out all at once; the ceiling began to crumble.

Some people in the store panicked and dove under tables, wrapping the backs of their heads and necks with their hands; others ran outside. Those who ran out reached the door at the same time and were stuck screaming and struggling against each other.

Instead of rushing to leave, I stood in place, observing the situation outside. It sounded like something plunged downwards at high speed earlier. I wanted to find out what that was.

Before long, the thick smoke cleared and the flames subsided; what I had been searching for appeared in that gap. After seeing what it was, my thoughts became even more complicated.

Making an unholy racket, a helicopter had embedded itself into the road. A military helicopter at that! Why would a combat helicopter fly into a civilian neighborhood and crash? Immediately, my question was solved through an announcement broadcasted over the loud siren sound.

[Citizens of Korea! This is a warning from the Fire and Disaster Department and the Civil Defense Center. We are currently issuing

nationwide air raid alerts…]

An air raid alarm–something that could usually only be heard at military exhibitions–resounded throughout the streets.

There was truly something weird happening. Although I was bewildered, I was able to maintain my calm since I knew nothing was real. The others in the store could not say the same.

"…D-did a war break out?"

"My phone isn't working either."

"Is anyone able to connect to the internet?"

"Are we going to die like this? What if we die…"

"Sehui-yah! Wake up!"

Since unfortunately the lights had all blown out and the building was dark, everyone stewed in their rising tensions before, eventually, the people ran out of the shop without a clear plan. This meant that the large groups that congregated to eat ran out in divided groupings of twos and threes.

Seo Dawon didn't immediately follow the others; instead his gaze seemed to ask me what to do. I had no particular plan, so I met his gaze and nodded. Seo Dawon cautiously took the lead.

While walking out of the store, I could hear the people in front whispering. "Are we at war with North Korea?"

"Are you insane? Honestly…"

"Are we going to die?"

As I half-listened to the chatter around me, I looked back often at the burning military helicopter and the blackening sky.

I was lost in thought, ‘I’ve never experienced something like this before. That is to say…this couldn’t be something that ‘Woo Ragi,’ had experienced either…’

After all, if a large catastrophe had happened like this in Korea, there would be no way I wouldn’t have known about it. So, there was a high chance that our current situation was fabricated by ‘Woo Ragi,’ the owner of this [Vengeful Ghost Memory], for my viewing pleasure.

If that’s the case, what on earth is he trying to do?

However, I couldn’t think about this for long. As if they had pre-planned a routine, the people walking in front had stopped simultaneously. I raised my head and looked ahead to check on what they saw.

“There’s a soldier…”

“A Soldier!”

“…It’s true.”

“Did war really break out?”

There really was an army up ahead. At the end of the commercial district, soldiers manning tanks, military trucks, and riflemen were blocking the eight-lane road. I saw a barricade as well.

An immense amount of tension flowed between the members of the crowd. Especially since the group we faced were so numerous and were all armed–a daunting sight.

Fortunately, the standoff was soon resolved. The soldier at the lead confirmed our identities through his telescope and gestured at us, as if motioning someone behind him to hurry to his side. Then, a soldier rushed to the front and handed the original soldier a megaphone.

[Citizens should move to the shelter.]

Upon closer inspection, there weren't only soldiers but also other civilians like us. Originally, because of the tension, I couldn't see the long procession that followed them, but now it finally caught my eye. The relieved people with us hurried to run towards the soldiers; after freezing from confusion, I also ran with Seo Dawon to join the crowd.

"We'll proceed to the shelter." The soldier said.

"Excuse me, what has happened?"

"We can't give you an answer just yet."

"How should we find our families? I can't get into contact with them…"

"No areas have reported any casualties yet. Most of the residents living nearby are likely to be in the shelters–please first follow the guidelines." Someone had asked what the current situation was like, but the soldier refused to answer, still maintaining that rigid expression. I paid close attention to the answering soldier–his attitude wasn't indicative of someone who knew nothing…It was evident that he was hiding something.

'There's no casualties yet, but the army has already been mobilized?'

There's no way. The military would not drive tanks to residential areas unless in a war or war-like situation. Otherwise, ordinary happenings could be handled by the police or firefighters.

However, the soldier seemed to have no intention of telling us anything. As expected, he tightly shut his mouth; eventually, the people surrounding him gave up in unison.

Looking at the expressions in the crowd, though, I could see that the people weren't fooled by the soldier's stern attitude. They were only reluctant to be punished for not following instructions and tried to suppress their rising anxiety.

Furthermore, when I compared Seo Dawon with the trembling, anxious people around him, something felt dissonant.

The migrating people were crying or looking at their cell phones while futilely attempting to call someone, but Seo Dawon didn't even attempt to ask about his family or contact anyone. I thought this sort of behavior suited him, but I also had my doubts, wondering if his actions were some kind of sign.

But, at that moment.

A strange noise suddenly rang out from back where we came.

[Gyaaaaah!]

Stomp stomp stomp stomp–!

At first, I thought I heard the roar of a monster. However, that would be strange since [Dungeons] don't exist in this world.

However, as soon as we heard that roar, we heard several rounds of gunshots from what presumably were the military; after the gunfire, everything was silent for quite a while. Of course the citizens who had heard these gunshots began to become more and more anxious. "….W-What was that just now? What was that noise?"

[Kekkkk!]

"Did you hear that?"

"Hnnnngh…."

"Run…Quickly Run…"

A new roar echoed through the area.

The sound was much closer than the one before. A new round of gunfire was opened and the roaring soon vanished. However, whatever 'it' was, it was headed towards us…No one voiced that thought out loud, but everyone knew.

Once again, a breathtaking tension dominated the whole area. Though the soldiers did not seem like they were rushing, they quickly prodded us to accelerate the procession. In that chaos, I slipped out of the crowd, avoiding the soldier’s eyes.

I held onto Seo Dawon’s hands tightly, worried that he might block me; fortunately, though, he moved according to my lead after briefly glancing down at me. Pretending to hobble, I looked backwards.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Back in form and TL-ing~
Mind is spinning while wondering what’s going on~
Merry XMAS EVE <3

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Chapter 167

Chapter 167

[Kekkkk!]

However, the moment I filed out of the ranks, something like a gigantic bird appeared in the air before me. To be exact, it wasn't a bird, but rather a [Gargoyle]–a bat-like monster that wakes up and roams around at night while sleeping as a statue during the day, like the one I saw in the [Tower of Command].

I had thought the [Gargoyle] looked bizarre when I had seen it earlier, but, under the light of day, its features were more disgusting than I had imagined. Horns that sprouted from its head; sharp teeth jutting out beyond its chin. Furthermore, long arms that reached below its feet coupled with its incredibly long nails…

Anyone could see that it wasn't a normal beast. In particular, the shiny yellow eyes of the [Gargoyle] made me feel numb even if its focus wasn't turned my way. It felt like I was staring at the embodiment of a devil.

For me, despite the fact that I had already encountered other monsters, I already felt incredibly overwhelmed; how much more overwhelming would it have been for ordinary people? In addition, the unique bloodthirst flowing from the monster was powerful enough to freeze everyone in the area.

Everyone in the crowd was fixed to their feet, riveted still as they watched the [Gargoyle] orbiting the sky. We were scared enough to run away immediately, but the fear of becoming the target after being the first person to move creeped over us.

However the taut tension soon shattered when the [Gargoyle] spread its two big wings. Confused screams erupted everywhere.

“W-What is that!”

“Kyaaaa!”

“Save us!”

As soon as the [Gargoyle] heard these screams, it folded up its wings and, like a diving athlete, swooped through the mob of people. It happened in an instant.

[Kekkkk!]

“AugghhhH!”

Then, the monster slowly soared back into the air; a man struggled, his shoulders held in the monster’s grasp. “…S-Save me!”

The man shook his body desperately. In a flash, the two rose quickly upwards, and they were soon approaching the height of the fourth floor of a nearby building. It would be difficult to avoid serious injury if he fell. Nevertheless, the man tried in any way he could to escape the [Gargoyle]’s grasp–even biting at its wrists.

Well, I suppose if they continued to rise in altitude it would become more dangerous for the man… Maybe the man was too engulfed with fear, of the [Gargoyle], that he hadn’t even thought of the consequences.

Perhaps annoyed by the aggressive rebellion, the [Gargoyle] used greater strength in its grasp on the man’s shoulder. Even at a far distance, I could hear the brutal sounds of the man’s shoulder blades being crushed into pieces. A scream resonated from the sky.

However, the man’s suffering didn’t last very long. Right after crushing the man’s shoulder, it opened its mouse-like mouth and tore into the back of the man’s neck. The man convulsed with his mouth wide open, as if he had been muted.

A little afterwards, the man's head slowly dropped. He didn't move anymore. With the man still hanging from its mouth, the [Gargoyle] descended. It was truly a hair-raising sight.

The monster continued to chew on the man's neck; eventually, it separated the pitiful man's head and body. Only after hearing the man's head burst like a watermelon upon hitting the ground, could I close my eyes.

Obviously, the other people couldn't have been fine with this gruesome scene. Even Seo Dawon, who had previously maintained a calm attitude throughout this pandemonium, couldn't tear his eyes away and could only just stare up into the sky.

"A-Aaack–!"

"H-Help…"

Everyone screamed; people scrambled to escape from the [Gargoyle] that began to eat the man's corpse. There were even some folks that were crawling away. The expressions of those who stepped on fallen folk while running or pushing young children away seemed to inform us that we were already in hell.

"What's that! What is that!!"

"Save us!!!"

"Arghh!" A scream cut through the pandemonium.

Bang bang bang–!

Finally, the soldiers opened rifle fire at the [Gargoyle].

As soon as Seo Dawon heard the gunshots, he looked at me with an expression like he had just awoken from a nightmare. He looked as if he had something to say, but eventually he just grabbed my hand without saying anything. He must have had questions, but first and foremost, it was best to get out of this place.

“Guns are of little use against monsters though…” I mumbled.

Seo Dawon paused momentarily when he heard my quiet, subdued murmur to myself. He adopted a complicated expression before coming to a full stop. “Are you still sleep-talking?”

He spoke sarcastically, but hitherto unseen tension lined his face.

Actually, Seo Dawon had been glancing at me ever since the [Gargoyle] had appeared–the [Gargoyle] had appeared in one of the stories I had told during the day. Just by looking at the monster circling in the air while eyeing the crowd below, one could plainly see that my earlier talk wasn’t just simply nonsense.

However, as if Seo Dawon was desperately hoping to deny it all, he pretended to be ignorant.

“You heard what I said during the day!” I shouted.

“I only pretended to listen.”

“……What?”

“I still don’t understand a single thing you’re saying right now, okay? So please, be quiet.”

“Does that make any sense? I……!”

Unexpectedly, Seo Dawon cut me off before I could begin to tussle with him. To be exact, he roughly pushed me over to block something over us, cutting off what I was about to say.

The [Gargoyle] had left the shooting soldiers–who knows when that change happened–and swooped in our direction. I seemed to be the target this time.

“Gasp, Gasp…”

“Get up!” Seo Dawon reached his hand out to me, who laid there blank at the sudden attack. I managed to stand up with his help and looked backwards. The Gargoyle glowered at me while perching on an electrical pole not far away. Its expression–that of a predator chasing its prey–matched the one I saw in the dungeon not long ago.

The monster was gruesome in the context of the dungeon, but seeing it in this modern location gave rise to new fears. No matter how I might try and convince myself that this wasn’t reality and that I was in a [Vengeful Ghost Memory]… I didn’t want to face the same fate as the man who died earlier.

However, the more dire the situation, life tends to throw ironic events at me. This time was no exception; unfortunately, my thighs were suddenly seized with cramps.

“Ngh…!”

“Lee-kyung-ah!”

My muscles became suddenly rigid, and I collapsed. The [Gargoyle] must have noticed the stiffness of my legs; it gently spread its wings and leaned forward slowly. It adopted the perfect posture to glide towards me on the wind.

Seo Dawon also noticed my dilemma and bent down to support me on his shoulders. However, if this continued, we would end up becoming a tasty 1+1 deal for the [Gargoyle].

I made the instantaneous decision to push Seo Dawon away.

Originally, our differences in physical strength would mean that he wouldn’t have budged an inch at my push, but right now Seo Dawon was only an ordinary high school student. In the end, he lost his balance. Simultaneously, I could feel a creepy presence right behind me, though I didn’t dare look back.

Afterwards, something cool-to-the-touch and stiff tightened around my shoulders, and my feet rose off the ground. In just two seconds, I went from looking at Seo Dawon to a view of the far-off street corner.

The situation felt much more grim as I could hear the flaps of wind rhythmically against my ears. Whenever I blinked, the ground moved further and further away, as if I were in a departing airplane.

I had moved far enough away that I couldn't see Seo Dawon's expressions; my whole body curled up in fear. I began to hear the [Gargoyle]'s soft breaths.

I didn't dare look up; I simply closed my eyes and hoped my death wouldn't be painful. 'If I die like this, what will happen to Woo Ragi?' Such thoughts flashed through my mind in these long seconds.

However, not long after I firmly shut my eyes, all noise (especially the sound of the wind) had suddenly disappeared as if someone had turned the volume off. The [Gargoyle] slowly began to ease up on its firm grasp.

I thought that bastard was going to drop me from this high altitude in order to gobble me up… But something was too strange for that.

My body descended slowly and smoothly, like I had worn a parachute. Even if I had closed my eyes, it didn't feel as if my body was tilting on an axis.

In the end, I couldn't stand this strange dissonance and opened my eyes. I hadn't been imagining things. I was actually slowly descending towards the ground. Of course, I wasn't heading towards the place where I had last left Seo Dawon but, instead, the middle of the inner city right below the blackened sky.

'…No way, was the [Gargoyle] trying to bring me here?'

Feeling suspicious of this incomprehensible situation, I mustered up the courage to look around me.

“Crazy…”

It seems that my thoughts were half-right and half-wrong.

Hanging gruesomely behind me wasn’t a parachute…but a beheaded [Gargoyle]. As it flapped its wings aimlessly without a head to direct it, the [Gargoyle] acted as a faithful parachute.

TL: I can’t tell if it’s more morbid or funny to imagine a gargoyle parachute >.<

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Chapter 168

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Step–

Finally, at long last, my feet touched the ground. The weakened gripping force holding my shoulders also disappeared.

I hurriedly stepped back, escaping from the [Gargoyle's] grasp. The headless Gargoyle flapped its large wings a few times as it lowered its outstretched hands–the very hands that must have carried me here. Flapping very slowly and very consistently…as if it were operated by a cog in a machine.

It didn't stop there; the headless [Gargoyle] began to get down on one knee and folded its wings slowly…The pose was so utterly polite, that I could imagine its bowed head if it were still attached to its neck.

"Why all of a sudden…" With nothing else to say, I stared at the [Gargoyle], puzzled.

It was then.

"Lee-kyung-ah."

"Ackkk!"

Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice from behind. Terrified out of my wits, I looked back; I had no idea when he arrived, but Seo Dawon stood right before my eyes.

The sight of the mage brought peace of mind, but I couldn’t help but wonder how he arrived here faster than me.

So, I approached him, eager to speak. “You.. How did you…”

“Long time no see.”

A strange sense of discord washed through me. However, before I could escape, Seo Dawon drew closer to me and dragged me into his embrace. He treated me like drenched wool–squeezing as he hugged.

“Wait a minute…” I started.

“I thought you wouldn’t be here…”

“Seo Dawon, wait a moment…!”

In pain, I struggled before losing my strength, but… Seo Dawon kept muttering something incomprehensible as he looked down at me. Various indescribable emotions waged war in his expression; I felt flustered, unable to keep up with his changing emotions.

‘…Is he like this because I was dragged away by the [Gargoyle] right before his eyes?’

However, somehow I felt that answer didn’t fit. ‘This is strange…’

Therefore I scrutinized Seo Dawon’s face–I was surprised to see his shining eyes.

His eye color was different.

Since the sky was dark, I was mistaken for a moment…but, the man standing in front of me had red eyes–the color of blood–not a deep reddish-brown.

‘Now that I look closer, his clothes too…He’s not wearing a school uniform.’

Paired with a neat combat uniform and the sharper lines in his face, he was a little different from the Seo Dawon on ‘this side.’ Should I say he looked a bit more adult? Of course, the Seo Dawon I knew intimately looked closer to the Seo Dawon in front of me.

“S-Seo Dawon?”

“Yeah.”

“You…How did you get in here?” Finally, noting the differences, I naturally realized that the ‘real’ Seo Dawon must have entered Woo Ragi’s [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. Relieved, I relaxed my anxious body and stretched my shoulders.

Seo Dawon paused and soon smiled mysteriously. I couldn’t really understand the change in his expression, but I just smiled happily since I was so glad to see him. “I’m so glad you’re here…”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I was at a loss since the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] was so weird this time. I couldn’t see Woo Ragi at all, only you…”

“I was there?”

“Yeah. I was with you until just a little while ago. That’s to say…your highschool self? Anyhow…I was with him, but then I was kidnapped and brought here by that [Gargoyle].”With that said, I glanced at the still kneeling [Gargoyle]. Even if it were to suddenly move and attack, I felt fine since Seo Dawon was here.

‘…Wait, that’s not it. What if Seo Dawon can’t use his skills?’

Feeling uselessly anxious at that sudden thought, I grabbed and shook Seo Dawon’s arm. “Seo Dawon! Can you use your skills?”

“Which one?”

“I strangely couldn’t use my skills after coming here? Can you?”

In lieu of an answer, Seo Dawon gently unfurled his hand, palms up. At the sight of the familiar golden magic circle floating above his hand, I sighed in great relief. How reassuring…I had no idea what I should do otherwise…

“That’s a relief. You still have your abilities…”

“……”

“We can finally find Woo Ragi now.”

However, Seo Dawon silently clenched his fist, canceled his skill, and stared at me. I was flustered by his stare that seemed to pierce through me…While I stood there, terrified, he placed his hands on my cheeks.

“W-What is it…” I asked.

“Lee-kyung-ah.”

“Huh?”

“How much do you remember?”

I stared at him pointedly–what a strange thing to ask… As soon as I didn’t answer, Seo Dawon instantaneously grabbed my neck. It happened so fast, I could barely think.

“Cough!”

“Is he a fake this time as well…?” Seo Dawon said.

“Wha…at…” Surprised by his sudden attitude shift, I grabbed at the mage’s forearm.

As soon as I gripped his arm, Seo Dawon loosened his hold, as if he were giving me another chance. Of course, even though his grasp relaxed slightly, he was still holding onto my neck. The mage didn’t hide his bloodthirst; if I didn’t answer properly here, he wouldn’t hesitate to crush my neck straight away.

‘Crazy…Is this Seo Dawon also a part of this Vengeful Ghost memory?’

I was bewildered. My mind went blank as I looked at him; Seo Dawon stared down at me before lowering his eyes. “…As expected, I still can’t kill while looking at your face.”

“Gasp….Cough…!”

“You look too similar. It makes me feel terrible…”

Surprised by the force of this gradual strangulation, I said whatever came to mind. “Back at the dorm, Vengeful Ghost summon…Cough…”

“……”

“During that…I…I came…here!”

“……”

“Hngh. W-Wait a moment…Dawon-ah…Wait…!”

Once I spat out those words, I realized that he was no longer throttling me, though that didn’t necessarily mean I was released.

One thing was certain: Seo Dawon couldn’t cause me more pain after seeing tears springing from my eyes. Noting that, I blinked for the sole purpose of squeezing out more tears.

In the end, Seo Dawon slowly let the strength fall from his fingers. Even after I was completely released, I was so surprised I sat down where I stood, trembling. Seo Dawon directly knelt in front of me and slowly wiped the tears away from my cheeks with his hands.

Even though his actions were friendly, I was still so anxious about his unpredictable behavior. Afraid of being strangled again, I flinched my upper body away, but Seo Dawon’s gentle voice stopped me in my tracks.

“Lee-kyung-ah, I’m looking for the real one.”

“Hnngh…”

What kind of bullcrap is he saying now…Those words rose up and filled my throat, but I narrowly managed to clamp my mouth shut.

However, Seo Dawon didn’t seem to care how I writhed away from him. He just simply seemed to be trying to find something on my face. His persistent gaze made my breath catch.

After scrutinizing me carefully, he slowly opened his mouth. “After you disappeared…”

“……”

“I turned over the entire world searching for you.” Observation finished, Seo Dawon stood up. As he did so, he began to mumble something incomprehensible once again. “But I’ve been looking for you for such a long time now…”

“Everything’s begun to fade.”

“……”

“Anyway…Sorry. You must have been startled. I started choking you all of a sudden.” His apology was somehow both bright and hollow. There was no trace of mischief within his words. It was just…he looked a little bored…and exceedingly unstable.

I didn’t want to hold the mage’s outstretched hand, but Seo Dawon appeared as if he’d stay in the same position until I grabbed it. As soon as I reached out my trembling hand, he patted the back of my hand–as if he was praising me for a job well done. Then, with tremendous power, he dragged me to a standing position.

“Can’t walk?” Seo Dawon asked.

“……” Even as he moved to support me, fear filled my body. Thus, my legs shook. Seo Dawon, seeing that, lifted me up and hugged me close even

before hearing my response. I truly didn't enjoy it, but, as soon as I saw his red eyes, my mouth wouldn't open.

Seeing my terror-stricken expression, Seo Dawon smiled. "Place your hands around my neck."

"……"

"Don't be too scared."

I somehow felt that he liked my shivers even though he told me not to be afraid of him.

Inwardly, I cursed like crazy, but the 'Seo Dawon' before me was currently a ticking time bomb. I couldn't dare provoke him. I had no idea what would trigger another tantrum. Furthermore, since he was a [User] in full control over his skills, the gap between our abilities was just too far for me to successfully run away or counterattack.

'What on earth is this Vengeful Ghost Memory trying to show me…'

By now, I was sick and tired of Woo Ragi, wanted to escape this place immediately, and see the 'real' Seo Dawon. Then, I recalled something this Seo Dawon had said:

'You look too similar. It makes me feel terrible…'

Buy Me a Coffee

TL:
Lee-kyung: I'm sick and tired and I want to leave
Me: No, no, stay there. I wanna find out what's happening.

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Chapter 169

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Seo Dawon walked through the downtown without hesitation, as if he knew his way.

I thought it had been less than an hour since the sirens went off and we were ordered to evacuate… During that short period of time, all the asphalt roads were destroyed, and many of the shops on the ground floor were engulfed in flames. Even the parked cars were not left intact. Most of the car's hoods were crushed and on fire; there were several that were completely turned upside down.

In addition, I couldn't see other people anywhere. However, bloodstains could be clearly seen on the road or the broken windows, amplifying the bleak image.

[Kyaaak!]

[Beep–]

Furthermore, aside from the [Gargoyle], all sorts of other monsters were making a mess of the city center. Where and when did these monsters–like an ant swarm–pop out from? These bizarre looking monsters roared and demolished the surrounding buildings.

At that moment, an intact car slowly crossed the road; I looked inside, wondering if a person was driving… As expected, the speed was far too slow. There was a monster instead of a person behind the wheel. A spider the size of an adult man was gripping the steering wheel; it stopped after

ramming into a telephone pole. The spider slowly crawled out of the shattered window.

The situation skyward was even more severe.

On the other side of the road there was a 50-story building. On the upper floors, a humongous black band-like, snake-like thing wriggled around until it had wrapped once around the circumference. Black scales flashed brilliantly when sunlight occasionally pierced through the ash-covered sky when the wind scattered the clouds.

Of course, no snake could ever be that large a size, so that thing was also probably a monster. I had no idea what that snake monster's goal was, but it steadily headed towards the top floor. During its ascent, I could hear the small chiming bursts of windows shattering as the glass couldn't withstand the force.

Huge flying objects that didn't appear to be airplanes or helicopters cast dark shadows onto the ground, terrible screams heard from afar, gunshots that sounded like fireworks… All this combined made me wonder if I had entered humanity's hell.

However, no monster rushed towards us even though we penetrated through to the center of this bedlam. Obviously, Seo Dawon must have done something. While staring blankly at the gruesome monsters destroying the city from within the mage's embrace, I hoped that no humans would appear in front of me.

"What…is that?" I asked.

Seo Dawon soon stopped walking; before us stood a giant altar that seemed anachronistic with today's modern urban aesthetic.

I had thought the thing before me was an altar because it looked like a pyramid cut in half with a staircase in the middle that led to the top. There, a dark blue flame wavered gently as it burned… I lacked the vocabulary to describe such a sight other than 'altar.'

Furthermore, the monsters placed something into the flame as if they were offering tribute, bowing their heads politely as if humbly bowing.

Naturally, I had misgivings about the ‘thing’ the monsters were offering. I had thought, ‘No way’… But, as I looked around my surroundings, I was shocked to see human corpses piled along the side of the road. I had even seen a hole carved into each body’s chest.

Simultaneously, I noted the faint smell wafting from the altar.

The smell of roasting meat…

“Urgh!” Eventually, I shuddered and closed my eyes. No matter how ‘unreal’ this world may be, my mental state wasn’t strong enough to endure the implications.

Rather, at this point, I wasn’t sure if I had entered the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] or if this was really happening.

In the midst of such confusion, a clear voice caressed my ears. “I needed a large amount of mana to get here.”

It was Seo Dawon.

And, his tone felt somewhat ominous. My eyes opened reflexively; Seo Dawon opened his mouth to speak while looking down at me. “At first, I thought about using my lifespan… But that wasn’t enough to cross worlds.”

“What…”

“That’s why I decided to accept the scenario.”

Rather than directing those words at me, it was as if he were speaking to deride himself. So, even without an explanation, I could guess that something fatal had happened to him.

“Are you….okay?” [1]

My question tumbled out instinctively, but Seo Dawon still adopted a smooth smile. In the end, he didn't respond to say he was fine, but he lowered me to the ground. Then, he slowly walked ahead.

He motioned for me to follow him immediately.

However…my feet stopped moving at the scene that soon unfurled before me. As soon as Seo Dawon started walking ahead, the monsters flocking at the altar began retreating, giving a wide berth to avoid him.

At first, I had thought Seo Dawon had used some skill, but I soon realized something was off. The retreating monsters all politely bowed their heads to the ground; as soon as the monsters fully backed off, I could see a white ride standing upright in front of the altar, hidden by the monsters' bodies earlier.

It was a staff. Where there should have been a jewel encrusted into the staff's head, a skull had been embedded.

Seo Dawon picked up the staff. As soon as he gripped it, blue light poured from the skull's eye sockets. It was as if the staff recognized its own owner.

Bizarrely, the altar's flame, which seemed like it could burn forever, had disappeared instantly as soon as Seo Dawon had grasped the skeletal staff. Because the color of the altar's flame and the light gleaming from the staff was so similar, there was obviously an eerie connection between the two.

Furthermore, when Seo Dawon lifted the staff into the air, the altar began to collapse on its own–as if it had finished its role. There was no sound as it collapsed in on itself. As if it were a balloon losing air, it melted into the soft ground; only a pit–a gaping black maw–remained.

That pit was filled with piles of ashes and burned corpses. As if the sky that had covered this ravaged city and its inhabitants had been preserved there.

“That’s not…?” I hurriedly asked before I could even untangle the mess that was my thoughts in my head. Seo Dawon calmly looked back at me. He opened his mouth as if to answer me, but, before that, the shadow beneath his feet started to grow rapidly.

The shadow, which had reflected an ordinary person’s shape, gradually increased in size until it transformed into a gigantic horned devil’s face. The enlarged shadow opened its mouth wide and began to laugh.

[It’s as you can see]

It answered, mockingly.

* * *

Immediately afterwards, Seo Dawon turned around, staff in hand, and approached me. On the surface, it still looked like Seo Dawon, but, on top of his head, a [label] that only appeared for Named Boss Monsters had appeared.

However, I couldn’t identify what monster it was because the letters were all broken. Either way, since that naming convention was usually attached to monsters, I was definitely shocked.

Users becoming monsters… Seo Dawon, what on earth did you do?

“How did this…” I started.

[It’s all thanks to you.]

The monstrously transformed Seo Dawon looked like he would be able to exert a tremendous force, even at a first glance. As he walked closer, step by step, the far-off buildings collapsed–one by one–like the altar that had collapsed not so long ago.

I hadn’t necessarily checked where the buildings collapsed, but I supposed a similar black pit might have been left behind. If that was the case, then how much power did this Seo Dawon have? Wouldn’t he have enough power to just destroy this world…?

What’s worse, the courage to boldly move at my own pace had long since crumbled with Seo Dawon’s appearance; my belief that this place was simply within the scope of the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] had cracked. If, as the other had said, something bad had happened in the real world, and Seo Dawon made a horrible choice in order to arrive here, then…

Then who was I? And what was this world?

So, bewildered and frightened of the Seo Dawon in front of me, I trudged backwards and eventually turned my back on him. While running, I honestly didn’t think I could escape. I just wanted to look away from that scene.

At some point, I couldn’t hear the sound of chasing footsteps. By the time I realized, Seo Dawon’s chest was already right in front of my nose. I couldn’t stop myself, so, with a thump, I crashed into his arms. The tip of my nose stung painfully. It was all so futile.

‘What should I even do to escape from here?’

No matter how hard I run, I’m still within this guy’s grasp…

I bit my lips, panicked. It was then–

“Choi Lee-kyung!”

Just then.

‘Seo Dawon’ called for me from behind.

TL: Happy New Years! This is my belated present to you all <3

I have…so many thoughts…I'm waiting till one or two more chapters to give my guesses though O.O

Footnotes

1. No he is not okay O.O

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Chapter 170

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Looking back, I could see ‘Seo Dawon’ standing there.

His summer uniform shirt, which had been white before, was stained dark red, and he carried a bat that he scrounged from who knows where– what had happened? Furthermore, the baseball bat was drenched in dark red liquid, roughly illuminating all that he must have suffered to get here.

However, coincidentally, he arrived right after [Seo Dawon] had turned into a monster; the delight at his appearance was overshadowed by tension. I stepped in front of [Seo Dawon], hoping that ‘Seo Dawon’ wouldn’t come any closer.

[This place has some fun things, huh?]

However, [Seo Dawon] was already staring at the other’s location with an interested look on his face. As soon as the monster finished speaking; I could hear ‘Seo Dawon’s’ footsteps running up behind my back.

“Wait…!” I hastily turned around, trying to warn ‘Seo Dawon’ to not come closer, but ‘Seo Dawon’ was much faster than I had expected. Without slowing down, he swung the bat my way. Surprised, I dodged to the side–I thought I might have been hit if I hadn’t avoided the swing.

However, it didn’t seem like ‘Seo Dawon’ was aiming for me directly and, instead, was aiming for the [Seo Dawon] behind me. The bat swung hard enough to create a whooshing, windy sound and stopped right before [Seo Dawon]’s right cheek.

The problem was… It didn’t seem like ‘Seo Dawon’ had stopped his bat’s momentum and merely attempted to intimidate the other. I don’t think most people could have stopped inertia right at that position. [Seo Dawon]’s powers must have intervened.

‘Seo Dawon’ held his bat, nervous; the veins in the back of his hands popped. [Seo Dawon]’s eyes glowed with fascination as he observed the boy who looked exactly like him. The tug-of-war between them ended when ‘Seo Dawon’ fell backwards from a sudden gust of wind.

“Dawon-ah!” I cried.

[Who are you calling Dawon?]

“……Ngh!”

I wanted to help the fallen ‘Seo Dawon,’ but the other was faster in grabbing my arm from behind.

Meanwhile, ‘Seo Dawon’ righted himself. Just as I felt relieved that he wasn’t hurt too badly…Something zipped past his cheek, scratching it and slicing it open; the younger man fell to his feet.

[Will this help to distinguish between us?]

“Don’t do that!”

[Seo Dawon] had inflicted that wound.

‘Seo Dawon’ had also perceived who caused him that injury. Holding a hand against his bloody cheek, he glared at the other with a fierce expression.

[I don’t think I’ve ever worn a cute uniform like that?] [Seo Dawon] mockingly whispered from behind.

“Don’t touch him…Please.”

[Why? Because he looks like me?]

At the monster's question, I looked at the 'Seo Dawon' that had fallen some distance away. An appearance and voice that fit what I imagined of the young mage…Furthermore, the same name…

However, even before this [Seo Dawon] had appeared, the other had numerous differences from the real Seo Dawon.

First, he couldn't use skills. Second, the real Seo Dawon and I were never high school classmates. This, I was certain.

Still, I was only half-confident until I saw the cross-shaped scar on his palm. After seeing that scar, I had already mentally processed that the 'Seo Dawon,' here, wasn't real.

However…

"Don't scoff at him… You also merely resemble Seo Dawon."

However, this monster that suddenly appeared and, like a demon king, began destroying the world couldn't have been Seo Dawon either. Like 'Seo Dawon,' he was simply another person that looked like the original.

[Seo Dawon] must not have expected my response; he was struck speechless. I turned around to look at him, matching [Seo Dawon]'s gaze with a firm expression. "You're also not the Seo Dawon I know. He…Even though that person died, he waited around for 3 years in the dungeon."

[What…?]

"He waited for me to arrive."

[What are you…]

"He's not someone who would fall into ruin just because I'm gone, like you did." As soon as I spat those words out, the world around us grew silent. And, confidence growing at the monster's reaction, I unleashed [Seo Dawon]'s grip on my arm and ran towards the other 'Seo Dawon.'

As I expected, [Seo Dawon] didn’t hold onto me. Rather, it was more accurate to say that he froze in place and didn’t move.

The monsters that disgustingly crawled out of the pit didn’t move either. The soaring sulfuric smoke, the ringing sound of sirens, the burning city… Suddenly everything stopped, as if time was frozen. All that my eyes could see remained still.

Like that, I was able to reach ‘Seo Dawon’s’ side without any interference. There, in front of ‘Seo Dawon,’ I raised his face–looking like he would cry at any moment–to meet my gaze.

“Lee-kyung-ah.”

“……Yeah.”

“Are you returning?”

“……”

As expected…My assumptions were correct; this ‘Seo Dawon’ was fake.

He tried to deceive me–he succeeded in making me doubt my own memories, something crucial went wrong. That was probably why so many strange events that went against the laws of this world had manifested, breaking down this illusion of a peaceful daily life and causing this sweet dream to fly away.

Perhaps that was why I could feel some hasty impatience in this ‘Seo Dawon’s’ tone. “The ‘bug’ can be fixed quickly.”

“……”

“I can also modify it to match anything you want.”

“……”

“Fine. Let’s stop this ‘high school first love’ scenario… How about becoming lovers before ‘Seo Dawon’ dies? You can return to three years

before, when Bae Jaemin betrays him, and save him.”

‘Seo Dawon’ dangled tempting bait before me, enticing me to stay. I looked at him quietly as he continued to speak.

My high school first love did not work out. His name was still foggy to me right now, but, nevertheless, this ‘Seo Dawon’ must have utilized those memories. This place that instilled so much ‘deja-vu’ within me was crafted through ‘Seo Dawon’s’ imitation.

However, I had also imagined what it would have been like to have met Seo Dawon in high school. What he would have been like back then, if we had attended school together. Those kinds of thoughts.

As ‘Seo Dawon’ had proposed, I had also entertained the idea of going back in time to save Seo Dawon in my dreams. As I grew to like him, I wanted to let him forget the wounds he had received. If that were possible, I would’ve done anything for that goal. Return to the past and persuade ‘you’… It would have been nice if it had been Bae Jaemin, not ‘you,’ that was roughly shoved onto that sandy dungeon floor…

However, none of that was real. Even if I saved ‘Seo Dawon’ hundreds of times here, I wouldn’t be able to save him back in reality. Rather, the longer I stay in this world, the more difficult it will become for him.

After steeling my resolve, I walked closer and grabbed ‘Seo Dawon’s’ hand. I held both hands together, covering the cross-shaped scar on his palms with my own.

‘Seo Dawon’ stopped talking and looked at me desperately–begging. I burst into laughter at the sight of such a pleading expression on the face of someone I liked.

‘Will there ever be a day where Seo Dawon will plead to me with that kind of face?’

So, I wasn’t upset. Also, I… roughly perceived the real identity of this ‘Seo Dawon.’

I rejected his offer with a gentle tone. “I wanted to do that before.”

“Lee-kyung-ah…”

“If it were back when we released Koo Hui-seo… I would probably have lost myself, deeply, here.”

“……”

“Sorry. I have to return.”

“……”

“There are people waiting for me.” Then, without a chance for me to react, ‘Seo Dawon’s’ visage shattered, starting from the hands I held.

Subsequently, it felt as if small windows were encapsulating my view; as ‘Seo Dawon’ shattered into small pieces, the ‘real’ space beyond was soon revealed.

A thin, feeble ray of light shone down from the ceiling into this dark, black space. The light illuminated a butterfly with black wings.

Because I had experienced this kind of space and its strange air a couple of times, I was able to retain some calmness. This was the space where the ‘real’ Vengeful Ghost Memory would unfold. And, probably, the butterfly with palm-sized black wings was Woo Ragi.

Woo Ragi lightly flew around as if he were swimming midair. His first words, after he landed lightly on my chest, was…

–You’re homo?

That.

TL: Not gonna lie, it was mega confusing, when translating, to distinguish between the two Seo Dawons. But, I think the novel did something interesting. Now that Lee-kyung knew Seo Dawon became a monster, all of his dialogue showed up in brackets, like other boss monsters within the game. His name was perpetually in brackets as well!

As for theories…I wonder what you all think?

For me, ‘Seo Dawon’ probably was the system (guided by Woo Ragi?? Unguided?) testing Choi Lee-kyung. [Seo Dawon], the monster, though, was an anomaly the system definitely didn’t expect. Does that mean that this possibility of a [Seo Dawon] is real…somewhere out there? In parallel worlds? Who knows. You’ll also probably get explanations for why this happened in a few chaps as well.

Next chapter: Woo Ragi. Whew. He’s…interesting.

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Chapter 171

Chapter 171

T.W. : Homophobic language

I simultaneously felt deeply upset and flustered by the sudden rude question.

Not only did I have a hard time catching ‘Seo Dawon’ in a lie just a few moments ago, but I supposed one could say I was having such a hard time because of this guy. But, to see all my struggles and to just only ask, ‘You’re homo?’…

Furthermore, Woo Ragi’s apathetic tone triggered my long-held trauma.

My first love back in high school had often looked at me like he was staring at a ‘homo.’ He was disgusted yet, at the same time, cultivated a sense of superiority from my affection for him.

He had once made eye contact with me while chatting with a large group of people. With sneering words that could only be meant for me, he laughed and said, “Isn’t it obvious when homos are nearby?” My crush was the social leader in that group, so the others surrounding him had agreed enthusiastically, saying how disgusting or creepy it was and cursing gay people.

Since then, I couldn’t bring myself to look at him when I felt that he was staring at me from behind… Woo Ragi’s words dragged that frustrating memory to the surface.

Frustrated, I tried to grab at the black butterfly that flapped its wings near my chest.

However, my fingers only grasped at my collar. Because I had never tried to touch these moving illusions in the [Vengeful Ghost Memory], I had not known they weren't tangible; I felt embarrassed.

Woo Ragi, despicably, pointed out my futile attempt.

–What were you doing?

"…You were being offensive so I tried to bat you away."

–Offensive? Ah, the butterfly?

Unexpectedly, Woo Ragi made the butterfly fly high into the sky without particularly responding to my catty answer. However, after sending the butterfly out of sight, he continued to speak without hiding the amusement in his voice.

–It seems like Dawon-ie is treating you well? Saying it's offensive and all.

"……"

–Are you miffed at the word 'homo'? What else would you call a 'homo'?

Anyone could clearly see his words were meant to mock me; I clenched my fists and raised my head…At the same time, the space suddenly filled with bright lights. It was like turning on stage lights for show time.

After squinting instinctively, I opened my eyes again; a shadow moved within the bright light. That shadow swaggered as it approached me.

–Your expression tells me you have a lot of complaints.

He said as he looked at my frowning expression that was caused by the light. Of course, even if it hadn't been for the light, my expression would have still been rigid since I thought he was a jerk.

Instead of being flustered, I endured the glaring lights in my eyes and stared up at him. Finally, I could properly see Woo Ragi's mug [1] staring back at me.

I had distantly seen Woo Ragi's appearance once in another person's [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. Surrounded by dozens of sparkling blades from his [Echo Blades], he was so utterly beautiful in his discipline; rather than mere martial arts, I felt like I was watching a performance art.

However, now that Woo Ragi was right in front of me…I could acknowledge his refreshing and beautiful countenance.

That was to say, his handsomeness was comparable to Seo Dawon, but… His image wasn't quite nearly the upright, moral mien that I expected of martial arts practitioners; rather, he looked quite decadent, as if he'd partake in drugs. Slight droop on the corners of his eyes; a faint sneer of cynicism that so suited him. Red lips and pale white skin…

I was almost lost in admiration for a man that called me 'homo'. I hurriedly tore my gaze away from the Woo Ragi.

–Weren't you looking at me like a total perv just now?

"What are you spouting! I've never done that."

–Well, I'm used to that…Homos seem to like my face.

However, Woo Ragi seemed to have pinpointed my momentary first impression of his looks from my expression.

He did not hide his ridicule or contempt as he grabbed my right hand painlessly. Then, pulling my hands towards him, he placed his lips on my wrist.

Startled, I tried to shake him off, but my skin burned where Woo Ragi's lips touched–the inside of the wrist–as if it were on fire.

At first, I thought the unfamiliar feeling was brought about the shock of his touch, but, when he removed his lips, I fully felt the burning pain. Woo Ragi had maliciously inflicted harm.

"Let go!"

–Didn’t you want to form a contract with me?

Woo Ragi suddenly mentioned the contract while I, bracing myself for the oncoming pain, tried to forcibly extract my wrist from his grasp; he smiled as if he knew everything.

Hands shaking, I glared at him. “…What do you want from me?”

–I want Seo Dawon’s contract with one more special clause added in.

And soon, a familiar red parchment paper unfurled between us.

I silently looked at the parchment; when Woo Ragi lightly swiped his finger, the parchment scrolled down, line by line. Then, at the very end, an empty [additional provision] section was revealed.

–Don’t lay your hands on my body without my permission.

“There’s no way I’d do that…”

–There’s no way? Then, that’s great. This is just to formalize it into writing.

With that said, Woo Ragi showed me the newly engraved clause.

[Party [A] will not touch Party [B]’s body without their permission. Penalties will be imposed for contact without permission–the intensity and duration of the penalty will be determined by Party [B]. Party [B] can only impose penalties such that it does not pose a threat to Party [A]’s life nor permanently damage the body.]

That meant he’d use the penalty to stop me if I ever touched him…I was struck speechless both by the homophobic condition and the mentioned bodily harm.

Didn’t that mean he’d torture me for a touch? It was a clear threat, no matter how I looked at it; a promise for pain, just like when he had placed his lips at my wrist.

“Are you crazy? I might accidentally brush against you.”

–We can distinguish between intentional and mistaken touches.

“What’s the criteria?”

–My mood. [2]

“…Then, you’re saying that if you’re in a bad mood, you’ll hurt me just like earlier?”

–If you don’t like it, don’t force yourself to sign the contract.

What utter nonsense.

Agreeing to Woo Ragi’s arbitrary contract would just be one more hoop to jump through, but, if I just went along with this, I felt that my heart would burst from how upset I was.

So, after taking a deep breath, I added a condition of my own–my own ‘fuck you.’ [3] “……Fine. If I touch you without your permission and you feel violated, then I’ll endure your harm, just like you want. However…”

–However?

“If, just in case, you touch me, then what will you do?”

–Would that ever happen?

“I didn’t think I’d ever do that to you, either?”

–Haha… Then, you do the same. I don’t care.

His added words were really so detestable, that I really want to attack back.

However, there was a big problem here. In my case, it would be useless for me to try and inflict any sort of harm onto him, unlike Woo Ragi who had enough skill and power to torture me.

Because of our level gap, damage potential would vary significantly; even if I stabbed him with a knife, I wouldn’t be able to mess a strand of his hair.

I don’t know if the bastard had agreed to the condition while knowing that, but if I also said “I’ll beat you up,” this additional clause was far too unfavorable for me.

However, I shouldn’t be the only one to suffer unilaterally. While thinking about what could truly hurt Woo Ragi, my eyes glanced at my hand that he was still holding. What could I do to get this arrogant Vengeful Ghost to taste a bite of his own medicine…

Then, I placed some force in my fingers, as if I was returning his tight grasp. While holding hands, I fiddled with him.

Then, as expected, Woo Ragi’s leisurely smile hardened.

–What are you doing?

He raised the hand that I had been fondling and waved it in front of my face. Of course, I was ashamed to be doing this, but…when I saw Woo Ragi’s expression as he gobbled up the bait, I felt validated rather than ashamed.

So, I replied with a grin, “If, by chance, you touch me…I think I’ll pet you, hug you, and fondle your hands like this.”

–What?

“Honestly, would it even hurt if I hit you? The terms of the contract are disadvantageous.”

He stared at me, caught off guard; I tightened my fingers as much as I could, trying to look unbothered. As soon as I used some strength, Woo Ragi shook his hands off, goosebumps traveling up his arm as if he had touched a bug.

I've known ever since he commented 'homo, homo,' but he seemed to be the macho type that believes 'homos' would suddenly attack him. Of course, I couldn't stand it if a guy was so clingy towards me as well, but…

–Are you crazy?

"If you don't like that, then withdraw your clause."

–With all you've done just now, you expect me to trust you?

My mood lightened watching Woo Ragi jumping up and down, temper risen. I ignored what he said and murmured, making sure he heard everything, "Your hands are so soft."

Then, Woo Ragi stared at me with such immature eyes.

–Just a little while ago, you made such a fuss about liking Seo Dawon…

"When have I ever said that I like you?"

–Then why are you groping at me so insidiously?

"What does liking someone have anything to do with teasing a guy who's crying 'homo, homo' and making much ado about nothing?" Since I was already teasing him, I answered without much push back. At my answer, Woo Ragi's expression changed a little. He looked like he had composed himself–his expression becoming calm. He opened his mouth.

–Fine. Then let's sign the contract under that condition.

"Seriously?"

–Watch. You brush past me? You're dying that day.

With that said, he adopted a chilling smile; at this point, I couldn't ask him to just forget both of our clauses…I had provoked him far too much.

I cried on the inside, lamenting that I probably shouldn't have done that, but…Eventually, I had no choice but to nod and pretend to be relaxed.

[Ending playback of the deceased, ‘Woo Ragi’s,’ memory]

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Haha…Woo Ragi… Smh…

You guys were so excited to meet him, so I upvoted everyone’s comments while going O.O
Honestly though, I’m excited to see him because Woo Ragi marks the advent of something that’s been long time coming: a Choi Lee-kyung who gives no fucks.

I might upload a bonus chapter later today or tomorrow~

Footnotes

1. (nat jjak) = informal way of saying face. Thus, mug.
2. PR: (I literally burst into laughter reading this)
3. (flinging taffy) = Fuck you.

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Chapter 172

Chapter 172

Slight dizziness accompanied the long-awaited ‘contract completion’ message. Enduring the dizziness, I closed and opened my eyes; I naturally expected to see Seo Dawon or the other servants in front of me, as had happened before.

But…

‘…Where am I?’

An unfamiliar room greeted my bewildered self as soon as I opened my eyes.

To be exact, a panoramic view of a hospital room came into view. I was lying atop a bed, with an electrocardiogram next to me, that beeped with every tick of the graph on it’s screen.

As soon as I dropped my gaze to look down at my body, I saw that I was wearing a patient’s garb as well and a thick needle inserted into my arm. When I followed the connecting tube, I saw a saline fluid packet hanging from a stand.

Let alone after a [Vengeful Ghost Memory], I had never woken up in a hospital room before, so I was flustered. Furthermore, my lips were dry, and my throat, as if it was being ripped apart, hurt far too much to speak. It felt as if I was in a particularly bad condition.

‘I was fine up until I summoned ‘Woo Ragi.’ Did something happen afterwards?’

At that moment, I thought deeply about the last memory playback. I moved my hand a little, but I felt a stinging pain poking into my skin. Looking down, I saw a blue bruise. While I was unconscious, a needle must have been stuck into the back of my hand.

‘I shouldn’t move around recklessly…’

Something must have happened after the summoning. Ominously, I couldn’t even see the noisy servants that had always surrounded me.

‘Seo Dawon.’

Just in case, I quietly called out his name, but, as expected, everything was still calm. The same was true of Lackey.

So, I decided not to move around futilely, rolled my eyes, and suddenly thought, ‘Wouldn’t I be able to get a grasp of the current situation if I manifested the [Status Window?]’

The [Status Window] could appear before my eyes with just a thought. Since the window updated in real time, it was highly likely that I could be informed of any changes.

‘[Status Window]!’

So, I read the words that popped up before me, but… Somehow, my situation was quite grave.

Name: Choi Lee-kyung – Lv 100
Class: Intermediate Necromancer

HP – 321,000 (-321,000)
MP – 102,040 (-103,040)

Title:

Sweeter than candy – Revenge is truly sweet

<The title: ‘Sweeter than Candy’ can only be obtained by users who, in the pursuit of revenge, inflict irreparable damage on their target without suffering retaliation or damage in return. While using this title, the title’s special skill, ‘Counter Attack’ may activate–doubling the damage from an enemy’s physical or magical attack and returning it back at the opponent.>

Greenhorn Adventurer – You’ve tasted the bitterness of life!

<While using the title ‘Greenhorn Adventurer,’ movement speed is increased by 5%>

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):

Magic: 680 (-680)
Magic Control: 3.9% (-3.9%)
Movement speed: 22.7% (+5%)

Skill:

– Summon evil spirits
[Summon Vengeful Ghosts: Proficiency 95%, Rank: High rank]
[Summon Sacrificial Offering: Proficiency o.7%, Rank: Lowest rank]

.
.

-Death Mark

After special conditions are met, you can attach a death mark to the enemy. A living enemy marked by death will suffer a significant loss in defense; furthermore, you can gain additional experience points.

-Shinigami’s book (new!)

You can summon a soul within one hour after their death and look into the soul’s memories.

.

.

(‘Choi Lee-kyung’-nim is currently subjected to a penalty after undergoing an unreasonable Vengeful Ghost Summon)

‘What’s this penalty?’

An ominous ‘minus’ sign accompanied all the stats in the [Status Window]. In addition, all of the [Class Skills] had turned red, which meant that there were restrictions on their use.

However, it all felt so utterly unfair while observing the [Status window]–there were no warning messages or any foreboding signs that something bad would happen before pushing ahead with summoning Woo Ragi. The summoning activated without problems and now the system informs me that I’ve gone beyond my own limits? [1] Did it think I’d just accept that?

“…What is this…bullcrap…? Ngh… My side fucking hurts…”

I straightened my torso in righteous anger from the absurdity of the situation, but my condition was really the worst. I might not have been scared from the [Status Window], but it seems as if my body suffered pain that could only result from being beaten all over.

In the end, I lifted my head briefly, violently trembled, before plummeting back onto the plush pillow. If anyone had been watching from the side, they probably would have just seen me stretching my neck a little before suddenly lying down once again.

–Creak.

Fortunately, I was not alone for long. A nurse opened the door and entered; she quickly approached me as soon as she saw my open eyes.

“Choi Lee-kyung-nim? How’s your condition?”

“……It’s A-Alright.”

“Wait a moment.”

Afterwards, a doctor entered, and I underwent a few tests. I was ferried to and fro, through the hospital hallway, while lying on the medical cot; I felt a little anxious after seeing the expressions on the hospital staff that were moving me.

‘This is the Ahn Hospital…’

Who on earth moved me here? Also, will I not be able to see Seo Dawon or the other servants until the penalty ends? When will the penalty end? etc… All these thoughts occupied my brain.

Also, I was a little hesitant to ask the doctor or the nurses about the other surrounding situations. I was a little suspicious of their attitude–their tendency to restrict information from their patient. I had no idea who was paying for the hospital fee either, so I just naturally lied down as I was told without saying another word.

However, when I returned to my hospital room after various exams, an unexpected person was waiting for me.

“Lee-kyung-ssi…”

“…Hui-seo-ssi?”

“I’m relieved, truly…”

It was Koo Hui-seo.

* * *

“Was Hui-seo-ssi the one to hospitalize me?” I asked.

“…Yes…” Koo Hui-seo replied in a somewhat hoarse voice. He then approached my prone self cautiously; his eyes seemed to be swollen and red. As if he had cried.

Hui-seo held a flamboyantly patterned handkerchief in his hand; while I stared at him, he dabbed at his eyes with that handkerchief several times. My heart wobbled a little bit at his cow-like gentle eyes dripping tears.

For some reason, I assumed he was crying like that because I was hospitalized. Because he kept staring at me like that… Furthermore, like a startled young child, he stayed at a distance while sniffling and dabbing at his eyes without being clingy, like he usually would.

Therefore, I waited for him to calm down, but Koo Hui-seo had only sniffed at the occasional 30-minute intervals.

Since he didn’t seem to have any intention of speaking, I eventually asked him a question first. “Excuse me, are you crying because of me?”

“Yes…”

“Uh…Mm. Well, I don’t have any idea of how I ended up here either…”

“Lee-kyung-ssi, you almost died…”

I thought he was crying a lot just a while ago, but, after mentioning that I almost died, it was as if a faucet had been opened.

Surprised and frightened [2], I raised my hand to stop him. Though it wasn’t my intention, Koo Hui-seo took my open arms as an invitation to hug me and dragged me into an embrace.

The weight of his body pressing down on me was a bit heavy. However, after feeling his wet and warm face rubbing against my chest, it felt a little

cruel to push him away. Left with no choice, I sighed loudly and patted the man's back. As soon as I did that, his grumbling sound grew larger.

Like that, 10 minutes passed by. Koo Hui-seo still refused to leave my embrace, but his tears had stopped.

Even though I thought the other was a bit shameless–still laying in my arms without being embarrassed of his tears–I didn't push him away. I'm just too used to this person's bizarre actions now. Furthermore, since he was only placidly clinging onto me, I wasn't scared either…

"Excuse me… Please explain. How did you know to come to my lodgings and take me to the hospital? How many days have I been hospitalized?"

"3 days…"

I paused his nuzzling in order to ask some necessary questions; Koo Hui-seo replied, mumbling his answers onto my collarbone. I pushed him away, telling him not to do that, but, since his blinking eyes were on the verge of crying again, I sighed and let the other do as he pleased.

With my tacit permission, Koo Hui-seo continued to like a baby. Only after I dryly coughed a few times, did he raise his torso. Then, he explained the situation to me with a more placid attitude, "Lee-kyung-ssi called me… Don't you remember?"

"I did?"

"Yes… You called me twice. You called, didn't say anything, and then called again…"

"Is that why you decided to find me at my lodgings?"

"Yes… I wondered if there was something you wanted to say that couldn't be conveyed over a call…"

Since I had no memory of that, I assumed that those were the servant's actions. Knowing that I'd been penalized, they must have contacted Koo

Hui-seo, the most useful person at that time.

Since they couldn't manifest properly in the world without my intervention…maybe they chose to use the phone with what little physical force they could exert…

TL: Bonus chapter as promised! Thanks to Kie and Sh1kari for the Kofi >.< Maybe I can get through my backlog of thanking people sometime soon >.<

Actually, I wanted to know what people think about a patreon? Nothing too big, but maybe like 1 or 2 advance chapters depending on tiers? I'm still on the fence and haven't really thought about pricing ($2/$4? $3/$6?) but it's on my mind for those that want to read advance and support. I'm still planning on updating fast enough that the people who read for free won't have to wait long at all.

The other thing I'm thinking about is making a quick discord for this + my other series, so it's easier to compile fanart/have people contact me about errors/typos etc!

Footnotes

1. (overpace) is a slang way to say that one's gone beyond the pace that they're used to–they've exerted too much.

2. So many words that don’t exist in English >.< (ship-gup-han) is like being startled bc of fright. A bit more nuanced than just ‘surprised.’

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Chapter 173

Chapter 173

T.W: Sexual Assault

‘Then, how are the servants right now?’

Gleaning that this situation was worse than expected, I took another look at the [Status Window]. There may be a clue in resolving the penalty situation.

However, nothing changed even if I pressed the red warning message. At that moment, Koo Hui-seo, after staring at my futile efforts, suddenly asked, “Does Seo Dawon-ssi know that Lee-kyung-ssi is injured?”

“……Yeah.”

“Then, hasn’t he come here?”

“Circumstances happened.” I barely managed to spit out something that didn’t seem too awkward, but I was still nervous because Koo Hui-seo didn’t look like he fully believed me.

Koo Hui-seo probably noticed that Seo Dawon wasn’t an ordinary human being. Since his mother was Chairwoman Shin, a former shaman and Witch, she may have passed some hints to him or he may have inherited some of her senses.

However, Koo Hui-seo had never publically wondered about Seo Dawon’s identity nor had he acted on his doubts, so I never had to explain

anything. And, if he knew exactly what was happening, I thought I shouldn't let him know about Seo Dawon's current helpless state.

Considering the misgivings Kim Olim and Seo Dawon had about Koo Hui-seo–and the way he dealt with Koo Kyungman–he may consider this time where Seo Dawon couldn't intervene a golden chance for himself.

Of course, Koo Hui-seo had signed a contract that prevented him from harming me, but I shouldn't let down my guard since he's such an unusual character.

Thinking about it that way, my absent servants were so mean.

'You've always warned me to stay far away from Koo Hui-seo… As soon as I collapse, you call that same person?"

Could they not trust Kim Sangyoon?

No, Koo Hui-seo's explanation may have been somewhat arbitrary. I didn't think he'd deceive me on purpose, but something was weird… Contrary to the servant's intent, Koo Hui-seo may have been the first to find my collapsed body and taken me to the hospital. He may not be lying, but that doesn't mean he's speaking the truth.

My suspicion of other people was largely influenced by Seo Dawon. Once or twice (or many times before) I've been stabbed in the back after just passing over such inconsistencies. The current situation may also be brought about after Koo Hui-seo had calmly committed something unimaginable.

So, while swallowing a deep sigh, I didn't bother to give a detailed explanation to Koo Hui-seo. I didn't want to particularly depend on him any more.

However, Koo Hui-seo obstinately insisted on asking questions today. "Then, will Seo Dawon-ssi be unable to come here for a while?"

"No…He'll probably arrive soon."

“When?”

“That…I’ll have to contact him to know…”

“Should I lend you my cell phone?”

I felt strangely tested after he took out a cell phone from somewhere on his body.

Koo Hui-seo blinked fiercely but did not stop his urging hand. Of course, I couldn’t accept that phone. Who on earth could I contact in order to pretend to set up an appointment with Seo Dawon…

While I dithered, Koo Hui-seo retracted his outstretched hand and looked at me blatantly. Then, he smiled meaningfully. My hesitation was answer enough for him.

With an amused expression, he asked, “It seems that Seo Dawon-ssi…is in a situation where he can’t be contacted.”

“It’s just because I don’t want to disturb him while he’s doing something else. But, If I’m in danger…”

“You’re in danger right now. You vomited blood… Your body temperature wouldn’t rise properly, so you were in the ICU until yesterday.

God damn…

I faltered and looked up; Koo Hui-seo bent over and looked down at me, like someone staring at a child in a cradle.

I was afraid of the incomprehensible smile that adorned his lips. However, I shouldn’t make that obvious. I calmly returned Koo Hui-seo’s hair-raising gaze without closing my eyes.

“Lee-kyung-ssi, your heart is racing incredibly fast.”

Beep– Beep– Beep–

Ironically, though, an electrocardiogram sensor was attached to my chest.

When my face turned clearly red with the ECG machine sound, Koo Hui-seo outstretched a hand towards my flinching self; he placed his finger on my face, close enough to poke my eye. I reflexively closed my eyes, but…instead of the expected pain, I felt a gentle brushing touch.

'Why is he touching my eyelashes…!'

With just that, I pretended to ignore him, but Koo Hui-seo took it another step further. He covered my eyes with one hand. On top of that, it was difficult for me to remove his hands by force since it was so heavy.

And–whatever he was doing–silence reigned between us. I opened my mouth to protest his actions, but suddenly he broke the silence first. "Are you still scared of me?"

"……"

"I still haven't done anything, yet…"

"……"

"Mmm…Why…Is it because you're lying down like this…?" His tone was full of amusement, but, as Koo Hui-seo touched my eyes, my intestines cringed. Should I say that it felt like a murderer hiding an awl behind his back was wandering nearby?

"Please…move your hand." Even so, I couldn't continue to suffer like this. Though I was terribly anxious, I expressed my dislike.

Koo Hui-seo seemed hesitant, but eventually pulled his hands off my eyes. Then, as soon as I opened my eyes, he bowed his head towards me and rubbed his lips around my eyes. He even made kissing noises.

Unable to endure, I swung my arm and pushed at Koo Hui-seo's head hard, but only a few strands of hair on his head were disturbed…it didn't seem like he was affected at all. However, after being hit two or three more

times, he slowly retreated. Huffing and Puffing, I glared at him as he took his hands out of his pants.

I looked at him, wondering why his hands were even there, but that thought stopped short when I saw his bulging crotch.

After giving another man such a huge shock, the pervert laughed shamelessly with a flushed face. “I’ll… come again tomorrow.”

Is he really trying to walk out without an apology?

Angrily, I yelled at him, “Are you crazy?!”

“Why…”

“Just what did you do to me…No, Just what did you do right now?”

“That’s why I covered your eyes, though…”

“You crazy bastard!” I yelled again. Perhaps because of my rapidly elevated blood pressure, I became dizzy and flopped back onto the bed again. Koo Hui-seo stared at me from a distance before pressing the ‘Nurse call’ button.

“Don’t let that bastard back in here!” I shouted at the medical staff running into the room while pointing at Koo Hui-seo, but I wasn’t sure if my words were delivered properly because an oxygen mask was so hastily shoved onto my face.

* * *

“Hyung-nim, do you want me to peel you more apples?”

“Lee-kyung-ssi would probably prefer bananas…”

Afterwards, I, feeling threatened, sent Kim Sangyoon a party message; the warrior ran to Ahn Hospital at once. I had thought of asking the medical staff to bar Koo Hui-seo entry, but I doubted he could be stopped by the medical staff's power. Thus, I thought about crafting a human wall.

Of course, I couldn't explain the detailed circumstances, but Kim Sangyoon happily accepted to be my caregiver when I requested that of him. And, he even took caregiving quite seriously.

For a while, I felt sorry for leaving unpleasant tasks to Kim Sangyoon. As soon as visitor hours opened at 6 p.m, Koo Hui-seo arrived with both hands full of fruit baskets and drinks.

I yelled at him to get lost; Kim Sangyoon was embarrassed, but soon succeeded in pushing Koo Hui-seo into the corner. Even though he was driven to where the radiator was located, Koo Hui-seo continued to look at me with a smile on his face. Then, despicably, he continued to give his opinion.

"Give me an apple. An apple." I said.

"Yes!"

I completely ignored the bastard, responded to Kim Sangyoon, and increased the TV's volume.

Kim Sangyoon, caught between me and Koo Hui-seo, looked like he was at a loss. However, when he realized I was purposefully ignoring Koo Hui-seo, the warrior moved his seat so he could hide me with his body.

As soon as he did that, Koo Hui-seo sighed deeply and apologized to Kim Sangyoon's back. "Lee-kyung-ssi, I did wrong…"

"……"

"Actually, I meant to do it at home, but I couldn't hold it in any longer…"

"If you say another word, I'll actually kill you."

“H-Hyung-nim… Put down the fruit knife…” Kim Sangyoon whined.

Of course, his apology was quite one-sided.

If only I was able, I would’ve stabbed him. However, my condition was far from recovered; while I was impeded by sudden muscle pain, Kim Sangyoon caught the hand holding the fruit knife. Sangyoon restlessly watched me. One by one, he peeled my fingers from the knife’s handle and removed it from my grasp.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Just a quick chapter before I run off to my honeymoon! (I’ll still update, but slower~)

Hui-seo’s so dead ya’ll.

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Chapter 174

Chapter 174

Kim Sangyoon was not soft on Koo Hui-seo, who was still trying to approach towards me. Perhaps because the Warrior knew Koo Hui-seo was the [Red Dragon] guild master, Kim Sangyoon was a bit uncomfortable as he pushed him away; but, when I showed my dislike and hatred for the other, the Warrior adopted a fairly tough attitude.

What's more surprising was that Koo Hui-seo, who was blocked at every turn, didn't seem to be offended. Rather, it was questionable whether or not he acknowledged Kim Sangyoon's presence. I could feel Koo Hui-seo's eyes staring at me through Kim Sangyoon's thick forearms–despite their intervention in his view–as if Koo Hui-seo's eyes were licking at me.

"Don't look at me." When I couldn't stand it anymore and snapped at Koo Hui-seo, the Red Dragon guildmaster docilely lowered his eyes. However, he kept on glancing my way and smiling shyly. How contemptible.

"Sangyoon-ssi, that bastard is a total pervert, so be careful." I informed Kim Sangyoon, my supporting wall against evil.

At those words, Kim Sangyoon flinched and looked down at Koo Hui-seo with a scary expression. "A pervert… Did this young master [1] do anything to hyung-nim?"

"Yeah. He suddenly shamelessly rushed in and, then, he had an ere…"

I managed to stop speaking–right when I was about to say ‘he had an erection’–by chewing on my tongue. Now that I think about it, Kim Sangyoon… isn’t this a sensitive topic for him, especially for our shared past?

However, using all the surrounding context clues, Kim Sangyoon seemed to understand what I was trying to say.

He turned to look at me; his face was so red that it was hard to tell where hair ended and where forehead began. With slightly teary eyes. Kim Sangyoon, with an expression that just dripped with unfair regret, protested, “I-I forced hyung-nim…!”

“N-no…Not like that.” I knew why Kim Sangyoon was acting that way, so I awkwardly denied his statement. The room’s atmosphere became awkward.

Of course, the true pervert Koo Hui-seo boasted a unique reaction yet again. He alternated looking between me and Kim Sangyoon, “How many men does Lee-kyung-ssi have?”

His words were such unpardonable atrocities against both God and man. [2]

Kim Sangyoon froze as he looked at me, shocked; I was also taken aback by the absurdity of the recently spoken words. However, Koo Hui-seo’s bullcrap nonsense didn’t stop there. “You’re too much–only rejecting me…”

“What…”

“I said that it’s okay if we aren’t exclusive… You refused, so I thought you were monopolized by Seo Dawon.”

I thought my head would be affected by his weirdness the more I listened to him. Looking around, I noticed a small drink on the table next to the bed. When I picked it up, Kim Sangyoon flinched but didn’t move to

stop me; Koo Hui-seo kept his eyes trained on the floor until I raised my heavy arm.

Whoosh–!

Unfortunately, before the thrown bottle could hit, something reminiscent of a black spider quickly crawled out from behind Koo Hui-seo's back and snatched away the bottle flying toward his head.

"Thank you. I was feeling a little thirsty right now…" Koo Hui-seo said.

"Do you really think I gave it to you for you to drink? Or do you think that I threw that at you?"

"If I've caught it, then you've handed it to me, of course…" Koo Hui-seo continued to adopt a heart-rending tone and began drinking the juice. Only after seeing that reaction did Kim Sangyoon seem to realize what kind of person Koo Hui-seo was.

Kim Sangyoon, wary of Koo Hui-seo, approached me, scooting a couple steps away from the [Red Dragon] guild master.

"I…suspect that, no matter what, Dawon-ie hyung-nim should come here…?" Kim Sangyoon whispered, fidgeting and throwing me looks of pity.

Of course, Seo Dawon, once again, did not answer my summons today. However, as my physical condition slowly returned to normal, my weakened stamina and muscle strength were normalizing.

"Do you want another bite?"

"Ngh…That's too much for me."

"Even so, you must eat to recover quickly, right?"

My shining recovery speed could largely be credited to Kim Sangyoon.

He bought and delivered foods that satisfied even my smallest cravings. After realizing that I happily ate apples, he changed all the physical recovery potions into apple juice flavored ones and carried them to my hospital room within his bulging forearms. Feeling sorry, I worked hard to eat all that he had brought. Maybe all that food was incredibly effective; my gaunt cheeks slowly began to gain weight.

And…Koo Hui-seo also had a profound effect on my recovery speed.

"Should I carry you on my back, Lee-kyung-ssi?"

"Fuck off."

"I wanted to touch your butt while carrying you on my back though…"

"……"

"Just kidding."

I ignored the bastard, held onto the walking aid, and slowly moved my legs. I don't know what had happened for the muscles in my whole body to have become so wrecked, but rehabilitation was essential when even walking became difficult.

Rehabilitation training is heavily influenced by the patient's will. Wanting to escape sexual harassment, I held onto the assistive devices, wrestled with them for an hour a day, and showed phenomenal recovery. If this speed persists, the doctors predicted that I'd be able to be discharged from the hospital within the week. So, Koo Hui-seo was a large help to me.

'When I recover, I'll make it so that his *'thing'* can't ever stand up again…'

I wasn't moving around with my dying will [3] just for the goal of complete recovery. Koo Hui-seo's sexual harassment crossed the line; I endured hellish rehabilitation with the determination to punish him myself.

That was how my days passed, and, two weeks after first opening my eyes, something happened.

[The penalty for Vengeful Ghost Summon has been lifted.]

[Class skills are able to used again.]

[You are now able to call upon your servants.]

Finally!

The long-awaited system message finally appeared.

* * *

When I saw the system message, all the humiliation I received and the pain I had suffered during rehabilitation seemed to melt away like snow. I even felt grateful to that despicable Koo Hui-seo. Though, I tried to not let that thought show on my face… Anyway, I had been worried that I wouldn't be able to meet Seo Dawon again, eternally, since this is the first time such restrictions had ever been placed.

"Seo Dawon!" That's why my voice sounded a little choke up as I called out his name.

I thought he would appear as soon as I called out his name, so I stood still, holding onto my pounding heart…More than 10 minutes passed by after calling his name, and not even his shadow had appeared.

"Why…"

Suddenly frightened, I manifested the [Status Window], but it contained nothing unusual. So, once again, I called out his name to the empty air. “Seo Dawon!”

“……”

“Hey… Why aren’t you showing up?”

“……”

“A-are you angry?”

I was grasping at straws, but, in the back of my mind, I was also eagerly recalling his mischievous nature.

Suddenly, I felt chilly hands covering my eyes and a strong power pull me into someone’s embrace. Though surprised, I didn’t hide the delight in my voice as I called out, “Seo Dawon?”

“Hnnn, I guess you really don’t need anyone except for Dawon-ie hyung?”

“Garam-ah! Ah, no, it’s not like that…”

However, once again, Seo Dawon didn’t appear. Jung Garam had responded to my call with a sulky voice before releasing shortly afterwards.

Embarrassed, I cleared my throat with a cough. After organizing my thoughts, I looked behind in a hurry. Not only Jung Garam, but Kim Olim and Woo Ragi had gathered, staring at me.

However, I still couldn’t see the Mage.

As if she had perceived my palpable curiosity, Kim Olim answered my unasked question. “Even if you don’t call for him, he’ll come soon. You wouldn’t know this, but we’ve been watching over you.”

“R-really?”

[Clack Clack!]

At that moment, Lackey suddenly popped out and buried its head into my feet, fireworks bursting from its skull, as if it were crying. In the end, I stopped looking for Seo Dawon and first lifted Lackey before drawing the skeleton into my embrace.

[Current Mood: Scared. Don’t like being alone. Scared. Can’t you hear me? Master…]

After checking the rattling skeleton’s [Current Mood], I felt a bit sad– this guy must have been so anxious while separated from me. Patting Lackey while simultaneously hugging it, I looked at the gathered servants. “You guys…how was your situation? You guys weren’t hurt by any chance, right?”

“……”

“Haah…”

“It was a bit frustrating. Choi Lee-kyung, nothing we could do would reach you.” Kim Olim answered while staring down at me with a professional, business-like expression. However, her blank face was undermined by an unfamiliar, chilling gleam overflowing from her eyes that I had never seen before.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: Still on vacation, but I didn’t want to leave you guys hanging for too long!

Also, Kim Sangyoon’s shared trauma RIP.

Footnotes

1. = nobleman or, in the modern era, used to talk about rich young masters.
2. (cheon ingong nohal) = acts that incite anger in both the heavens and humanity. A common idiom.
3. = to die or to live/whether or not I die, etc. It’s a phrase used to show determination. So, dying will, I thought, was a good comparison.

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Chapter 175

Chapter 175

“It was the first time I felt helplessness.” With that said, she outstretched her hand slowly. I didn’t avoid it, and she suddenly grabbed me by the collar.

She didn’t move to strangle me, but, since her action was just so sudden, I became rigid from bewilderment. She lifted me lightly, like the shield she summoned, and pulled me right in front of her.

After doing all that, it was obvious that her clicked tongue was simply just for show. “You’ve become lighter during this time. You’ve probably lost around 3 kilograms.”

My anxiety was suddenly swept away by this act–like a grandfather grumbling about his grandchildren. Energy lost, I grumbled, an unknown feeling–was it despondency? Was it relief?–laden in my words. “Do you always have to find that out in this way…”

“You look cute when you’re plumper, so take care of your body from now on.”

“Haah… I didn’t lose that weight because I wanted to…”

However, despite my protests, Kim Olim simply pulled on my cheeks without hesitation. That didn’t hurt, but her touch did hurt my esteem; I crumpled my brows.

Of course, she ignored my frown and only said what she wanted to say. “Your skin got rougher too. Were you trying to invoke my sympathy by being so grubby?”

“Jus- who woul- think like tha–” [1]

“That’s not cute, so eat well.”

However, contrary to her stern tone, the hands holding onto my cheeks began to glow white; my body was enveloped in warmth. It felt just like someone was patting my back with a gentle hand.

I assume Kim Olim did something? Since whatever she did didn’t feel so bad, I leaned into her without complaint; after a long while, the Paladin took her hands off of me. Then, as if she was dissatisfied, she grumbled under her breath while wrinkling her forehead, “Because you’re part of ‘that attribute,’ my skills won’t immediately recover your condition.”

“It did feel warm though…” I said.

“Do you really think I would’ve used a Paladin skill only to warm your body?” Then, she looked down at me regretfully.

Woo Ragi, who had just been listening from behind, suddenly interrupted our conversation. “What’s all *this*?”

“……?”

“How did you manipulate Kim Olim?” [2] He stood there with arms folded, narrowing his eyes, as if I had influenced Kim Olim somehow.

His reaction was just so absurd, I was going to ignore him, but, instead, Kim Olim blushed and took several steps away from me, making excuses. “I just simply tended to him because he looked like a puppy left out in the rain!”

“How on earth does he look anything like that? He just looks like a stick thin ho… a stick thin boy.”

“He was worth looking at when his cheeks were still chubby. It’s not as good now, but, if he recuperates well, they’ll be as puffy as before.”

“No… What I’m saying is, what do puffy cheeks have anything to do with you, why should I care about that?”

“……” When Kim Olim heard Woo Ragi’s question, she went silent, as if she fell into deep contemplation, and then turned around to look at him. Her expression looked a little frustrated, and her responding question belied how incomprehensible she found her guildmate’s words. “Ragi, didn’t you feel anything when you signed a contract with Choi Lee-kyung?”

“Feel what?”

“After the contract, when the tattoo design appeared…didn’t you feel an upsurge of emotion?”

“……?” Woo Ragi raised one eyebrow, as if this was the first time he’d heard or experienced that. Kim Olim looked as if she was going to continue, but she closed her mouth, conscious of me.

I was curious as to what the Paladin was going to say, but before I could ask, the space next to her darkened and split open. I was so surprised I forgot to speak.

The other servants only observed such a scene without raising their guard. Meanwhile, an upright white hand popped out of that dark gap. I was scared at first, but, when I recognized the ring adorning that hand, I could hide my joy and ran forth.

“Seo Dawon……!”

“……”

However, from the very moment Seo Dawon walked through that gap, his expression was different from what I had expected. He looked somewhat angry; as soon as he made eye contact with me, the gleam in his eyes became fiercer–the atmosphere in the room was unusual.

“Um… D-did you worry a lot……?” I stuttered.

“……”

Crumbling under pressure, I took the initiative to begin speaking, but Seo Dawon’s steely, cold eyes remained the same.

That didn’t mean I began hesitating or clinging onto his hem, though. Seo Dawon sighed for a long while, and then spoke in a more relaxed manner, “……I told you to cut the connection and return, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“What? I didn’t hear anything like that…”

“You kept on saying you couldn’t, everytime you attempted to make a connection.”

Seo Dawon told me to quit, but I rebelled?

Feeling unfairly wronged, I looked around; Woo Ragi also seemed to have no idea, perhaps because he was dragging his feet in signing the contract with me. Kim Olim began clicking her tongue.

Sitting with his chin cupped in one hand, Jung Garam looked at me. “That’s right. You rejected us by cutting your link to us. Dawon-ie hyung’s rationality was also cut off at that moment as well…”

Jung Garam shook his head as if he remembered something terrible.

Honestly, I was feeling so unjustly maligned? When I finally returned to my senses after summoning, I was already in the [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. Right afterwards, it was Ahn Hospital. However, besides Lackey who nodded hard whenever I spoke, no one seemed to believe in my words.

“Hey, wait a minute… Did you guys really give up on me because of that guy?” Behind my upset self, Woo Ragi grumbled with an expression of disbelief.

Jung Garam glared at his former colleague with eyes wide open, as if he had been waiting for those words. “Hyung, did you really do something to

him?”

“All of a sudden something strange wanted to link with my subconscious world, so I put it on hold. I can’t be expected to allow something of unknown origins to plant itself in my head.” Woo Ragi made excuses, as if he were burdened by his teammate’s continuing questions.

However, Kim Olim, who had been listening quietly all this while, had joined in on the pursuit. “Didn’t the system message explain everything when Choi Lee-kyung linked with you? It should have explained the contract and its purpose.”

“But… only a fool would just readily believe that. Of course I have to test it.”

“Do you think Lee-kyung was a spam mail or something?”

“Then, do you think I’m overly sensitive? I’m sure, during that time, you guys would have received that joke of a scenario [3] as well.”

“……”

“……”

“Compared to that scenario, the conditions set forth by that homo is just too good. I’ve already been hit hard in the back of the head once, did you expect me to welcome him with arms wide open?”

While observing their prickly confrontation, I vaguely understood that something–something else I didn’t know–had happened to my servants.

To be fair…from my perspective, the perspective of the contractor, I may simply be activating a skill called [Vengeful Ghost Summon], but the others could describe that as an ‘invasion,’ as I would have been rifling through their memories.

In Seo Dawon, Kim Olim, and Jung Garam’s case, I had passed immediately since they accepted me; Woo Ragi was extremely wary, so he

hadn’t accepted my proposal and used his abilities to test me.

‘But, what is this ‘Scenario’….?’ What truly bothered me, though, was the scenario that they had been offered.

From the servant’s attitudes and how they all grew quiet simultaneously at the mention of such ‘scenario’, I assume they had received another proposal before signing the contract with me… But, the offered conditions must have been unfavorable.

No, looking at Kim Olim’s expression of utter disgust, it might not be right to even call it a proposal. I had a lot of questions, but I stayed silent since I didn’t think it was the right time to ask.

“Since you’re so idiotic, you blindly threw a temper tantrum.” At that moment, the previously calm Seo Dawon suddenly cursed.

If Woo Ragi had been frowning before, his expression now was a volcanic eruption. “Are you talking to me?”

“If you know that much then you should’ve at least turned a deaf ear; what’s the point of confirming what you already know.”

“I’ve explained my stance well enough, though?”

“Before that, you should apologize to Choi Lee-kyung. Now that you’ve signed the contract, you can’t sweep this under the rug by pretending ignorance.”

Surprised by the sparks flying between the two, I stared at Seo Dawon, but the mage didn’t spare me a glance and only looked imperiously at Woo Ragi.

Woo Ragi, on the other hand, alternated looking in between me and Seo Dawon as if he had heard something unbelievable. He snorted and asked, “Are you high?”

TL: I hope this is conveyed well, but honestly Woo Ragi is kind of the hardest to pinpoint dialogue for since he speaks so casually/with so much slang. It's kinda hard to find that one to one comparison in English.

Kim Olim dotes on the hamster so much T_T Lee-kyung has two hands for a reason ya'll.

Footnotes

1. His cheeks are being pulled and squished, so he can't speak properly.
2. (literally, to bake and steam). It's slang for making someone do as you want.
3. The actual descriptor is more harsh…something like 'fucking' scenario, but that doesn't flow as well.

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Chapter 176

Chapter 176

The mage’s purposeful walk towards the other was so unsettling, I hastily held onto Seo Dawon. I spent all this effort trying to summon the blonde; I couldn’t just watch the mage growl at him like that.

The problem, though, was that no matter how much I pulled at Seo Dawon, he wouldn’t budge. Though the mage did not push me away, he wouldn’t stop his advance either; Seo Dawon only looked back when I whined and hugged his waist.

Woo Ragi, who also took a step forward, looked shocked when he saw that scene. It was as if the thought, ‘Just what am I looking at?’ rattled his head as he looked between me and his former guildmaster. “It wasn’t that the homo had some unrequited love for you?”

My face involuntarily flushed red at those words. I knew Woo Ragi, through the [Vengeful Ghost Summon Memory], had observed the extent to which I liked Seo Dawon.

However, it seemed like Woo Ragi was questioning Seo Dawon rather than me. He stopped in his tracks and asked the mage, “You touch men too now?”

“……” Seo Dawon’s face was full of contempt, as if he didn’t even want to acknowledge him with an answer. Then, after a long sigh, he replied to Woo Ragi in a placid tone, “Choi Lee-kyung and you are now in a contractual relationship; he’s not some tool to be used for your convenience.”

“I get that you got attached to him while I was gone, but… don’t try to force me. What do you want me to do about something that’s already happened.”

“You must think Choi Lee-kyung can be replaced at any time, huh?”

“……” Woo Ragi paused for a brief moment and then shrugged his shoulders. His attitude showcased his lack of denial.

Jung Garam, who had been watching the battle between his two older guildmates with a bored expression, slyly grinned. “Hyung, Lee-kyung-ie is the only Necromancer.”

“What?”

“Lee-kyung-ie is the only Necromancer available to sign a contract with us.”

“Is he really such a high-level Necromancer?”

“It’s not that… It’s that the Necromancer class itself is rare.”

I didn’t even deny that point, since it was the truth–no exaggeration needed. Woo Ragi, frowning more than before, began looking me up and down.

On top of that, Kim Olim also wedged herself into the conversation. “If Choi Lee-kyung dies, we’re finished. There’s no ‘next time.'”

“Is that why you’re trying to please him? You want me to take part in that?” However, Woo Ragi maintained his prickly attitude, as if he were some college student that had been infected with 8th-grader-syndrome late.[1]

Honestly, did the others look like the kind of people that’d treat me like some king because I was rare? How could a guy who’d been friends with them for years misunderstand his friend’s personalities more than me, who’d only known them for a few months?

It seemed I wasn’t the only one who was frustrated. Kim Olim closed her eyes and ignored him; Jung Garam mumbled under his breath–though everyone could still clearly hear–“Ragi-hyung is being stubborn again…”

Woo Ragi looked furious, but, in the end, he didn’t say anything to them and simply shot me a silent glare. His expression belied the fact that he wanted to hit me, but, despite the harshness of that glare, I didn’t find him too scary. Maybe I took confidence in Seo Dawon’s presence right next to me…

“Hey, homo. I didn’t mean to kill you, but… I’m sorry you were so fucking sloppy you almost died.”

“……”

“Ah, what? Did I say anything wrong?”

I wasn’t even angry at that ridiculous attempt at an apology. Was it because the other servants were so scornful on my behalf…? Also, because Woo Ragi was homophobic. I didn’t expect to hear nice things from someone who hated ‘homos.’

So, before the others could rush forward, I nodded; Seo Dawon stared blankly at me before closing his mouth. The hospital room soon became silent.

* * *

“Discharge? So suddenly?”

“Yes… Mm, Seo Dawon’s back at the house now too, so…”

“I-Is that so…”

A few hours later, Kim Sangyoon entered the hospital room.

He was surprised to see me packing and asked me what happened; I announced that I had recovered enough. Nevertheless, he repeatedly recommended that I just sit still in bed. Feeling sorry for him, I refused, but the other servants also told me to stay still. Once again I was forced to receive help from others.

While packing, Kim Sangyoon asked me a question in a tone that belied his disappointment, “But, how could Dawon-nim not visit even once during the entire time hyung-nim was hospitalized…”

“……” Startled, I looked at Seo Dawon standing next to me; the mage only lowered his eyes, saying nothing.

This situation was one where the mage couldn’t interfere or intervene, so it seemed a bit unfair for him to receive this criticism. The moment I opened my mouth to correct Kim Sangyoon’s misunderstanding though, Seo Dawon first grabbed onto my hand tightly, and the words died in my throat.

Looking at my expression, Kim Sangyoon must have thought I felt hurt by his words. Flustered, he apologized, “N-Nevermind. I’m being presumptuous…”

“It’s okay. But…Dawon-ie also had some circumstances…”

“Understood. I just…was curious.”

After this awkward conversation, Kim Sangyoon accelerated his packing. “Hyung-nim, I’ll move the luggage to the parking lot.”

“…Alright. Thank you.” After we left the hospital room, I gave my parting greetings and looked towards Seo Dawon. I hoped he wouldn’t blame himself or take his anger out on Kim Sangyoon for no reason.

However, Seo Dawon only gazed at the floor and had nothing much to say. The subdued atmosphere tugged on my heart. I grabbed his sleeve, but he looked back at me without saying a word and soon stood up from his seat.

“Then, if something happens, please call on me! I’ll come straight away,” Kim Sangyoon announced.

“Yes. Thank you so much for all that you’ve done during this time, Sangyoon-ssi…”

After collecting the receipt, we returned home. Kim Sangyoon said he’d move my luggage all the way inside, but, since it was only just one bag, I thought that was too much. In the end, he only brought it to the front door before backing away.

Certainly, compared to before, Kim Sangyoon’s reticence towards me seemed to have disappeared (though he still grew a little anxious whenever I reached my hand towards him). It was strange to see his sincerity. As I looked at the sports car and its loud exhaust sound disappearing into the horizon, I thought that it wasn’t possible for people to fundamentally change so much…

“…What on earth is this?!”

However, I forgot all that as soon as I opened the front door and entered the living room. There was no time to be immersed in grateful emotions when such a horrifying scene unfolded before my eyes.

“They must have forgotten to clean up.”

“It’s tiresome, so let’s have Lackey deal with it, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“What’s this, you live in a better home than what I expected. But why’s the living room so destroyed?”

The other servants calmly responded to the sight, but I couldn’t do the same.

It was as if the place bore witness to a fierce fight. The sofa was covered with some debris, and the marble floor was cracked here and there. The glass table, which had no flaws before I collapsed, was shattered into

pieces. Additionally, what was with the vase stuck in the center of the TV screen?

“Did you get attacked?” Woo Ragi asked.

“The glass hasn’t been cleaned up yet, so come this way.”

However, unlike my shocked self, the servants moved around without showing much agitation. In particular, Seo Dawon picked me (who had gone completely rigid) up and crossed the living room, wading through the broken shards.

I stayed still until I was laid down on the bed. As soon as my butt touched the mattress, I jumped up like a spring and grabbed the mage. “Hey, why is it such a mess over there? Did something happen after I collapsed?”

“……” However, Seo Dawon was silent. Strangely, he avoided my gaze and looked far away.

However, soon afterwards, Jung Garam opened the door, barged in, and hugged me. As if he were telling on someone, he pointed out the culprit in an accusatory tone, “Dawon-ie hyung completely smashed everything.”

“What?”

“I tried to stop him, right? But, hyung grabbed me and threw me.”

Shocked by the unbelievable explanation, I turned towards the mage. Seo Dawon didn’t react much to Garam-ie’s frivolous words. However, seeing as he didn’t deny, it seemed that he actually destroyed the home.

“Why did you do that!” I shouted.

“I failed to control my skills.”

“Huh?”

“My concentration kept on being disturbed.” Then, Seo Dawon looked at me gently, as if I were the cause.

I thought I should let this topic go, but, once again, my heart gripped onto it unexpectedly. I couldn’t believe my heartbeat raced at the thought of him destroying the house… Wasn’t I completely hopeless? A sense of shame and futile expectation rose within me.

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: A bit of an early update~ (I have to be on a 20 hour plane ride tomorrow, so I can’t upload then!)

We have… a non-apology…but don’t you guys worry!

Footnotes

1. I might have explained before, but 8th-grader syndrome (or chuunibyou syndrome) is this sort of edgy childishness .

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Chapter 177

Chapter 177

“Choi Lee-kyung, what’s with that lively expression?” However, someone who could severely scold me entered the room. As I returned to my senses because of Kim Olim’s contemptful face, I hurriedly tore my gaze away from Seo Dawon.

Jung Garam, though, giggled and hugged onto my neck, dragging me back down onto the bed. Then, smiling meaningfully with his eyes, he said, “What’s that? You’re into that?”

“Don’t say such weird things and get off…” I mumbled.

“What’s wrong with Jung Garam?” Following Kim Olim, Woo Ragi also entered the room, saw the scene inside, and clicked his tongue. In particular, he concentrated on Jung Garam, who was on top of me. Though he didn’t say much, it was clear that his gaze conveyed something akin to ‘What kind of homo bullshit is this?’ To put it nicely, his expression was so very honest.

However, Jung Garam didn’t seem to feel any shame; he placed his face closer to mine. When he looked my way, he shouted, “Oh?” as if he had found something. “Ragi-hyung’s symbol is over here, huh?”

“Hm?”

“I’m talking about your earlobe.” With that said, Jung Garam reached out and touched my left earlobe; my shoulders wriggled since his touch on that pattern was quite itchy.

Woo Ragi stared at us for a while, before tilting his head away. Temper raised, he rubbed at his neck. “…Hey, don’t mess with that.”

“……”

A few seconds later, he turned a frustrated frown onto Jung Garam. The young assassin smiled, mischievously toying with his hyung, and soon removed his hands from my ear.

After Jung Garam released me, though, Woo Ragi strode towards me and pressed down the side of my head with his palms in order to scrutinize my ear more closely. The posture was quite uncomfortable–and I moved around a little to avoid his touch–but Woo Ragi’s chilly voice spoke first. “Don’t move, hm?”

“W-Why are you doing this?”

“Shut up. Let me check something.” Woo Ragi didn’t touch my rigid body with his fingertips. Somehow, I figured out that he seemed to be distracted by the pattern on my earlobe.

Then I felt something feather-light touching my ear, but the moment I locked eyes with Woo Ragi again, the soft sensation had disappeared. He brushed himself off and stood up again as if nothing had happened.

“What’s the basis for this contract?” Woo Ragi turned his head towards Seo Dawon.

“When the servant is revived to his former self, only two feelings will remain: longing for the master who signed the contract and hatred for the enemy that killed him.” The one to answer his question was not Seo Dawon but Kim Olim.

After listening to her, Woo Ragi looked as if he fell deep into contemplation before shooting me a sidelong glance. “It looks like I’ll be driven crazy if this guy gets injured? What the hell is this? Why should I be driven to feel or think this way about a bastard I fucking don’t like.”

“That’s because of the servant’s special position. It can’t be helped; it’s enforced by the system. Since this is a subordinate relationship, the system is focused on weakening your ego. Of course there is still some space to resist, but, as a whole, it’s inevitable to be instinctively attracted to Choi Lee-kyung.”

“Disgusting.”

“Well, you’ve always been the type to avoid being emotionally entangled with others… However, this isn’t what Choi Lee-kyung wants.”

At those last words, Woo Ragi made a mysterious expression; when he looked down at me again, it seemed as if his hostility was lightened by a single level.

I had also been shocked by the obsession the servants had shown before, so I felt some responsibility for the confusion Woo Ragi felt. Though I hadn’t intended for that effect, it was true that they were greatly influenced by my condition and feelings.

So, partially making excuses, I hesitantly said, “I’m not planning on using your feelings in any way, so relax…”

“That’s a given. You. You’re not allowed to touch my symbol when you’re alone.”

“……”

However, the way Woo Ragi conveyed his requests was so totally wrong. That’s why I blinked, grabbed at my left earlobe, and started pulling at it. Though, not enough that it hurt. However, I pressed hard enough on the earlobe pattern.

I was aware that I was acting childishly, but it felt very good to watch one of Woo Ragi’s eyebrow rise high. Jung Garam, looking from the side, burst into laughter and rolled around on the bed, cackling.

“Is this homo bastard crazy…?”

“Why do you have so many things you don’t want me to do? Asking me not to touch my own body…you know my earlobe is my body, right?”

“Want me to turn you into Van Gogh?” [1]

His voice showed enough bloodthirst that belied his intent to actually follow up on that threat, but I wasn’t in Woo Ragi’s [Vengeful Ghost Memory] right now.

Furthermore, there were three other servants next to us who were enjoying this situation. So, I ignored Woo Ragi, twirled around, and laid prone on the bed. Without even looking at the guy, I mumbled quietly, “Also, you, if you say ‘homo bastard’ one more time… I’m going to pierce my ear right through your symbol.”

“What?”

“I’ll do everything that would fit a ‘homo bastard.’ You look like someone who’d froth at the mouth at the sight of a man who wears earrings.”

“……”

“Pffhahahaha!” It was so refreshing to just stretch out after throwing a tantrum. When I looked towards Woo Ragi, who was growling, he looked sharply back at me. His eyes were so sharp; if looks could kill…

However, the more I looked at his peeved face…

‘It’s fun…’

It was so thrilling! It was so refreshing to see reactions–ones that people like Seo Dawon or Koo Hui-seo would never make…

Honestly, I definitely had the upper hand in a situation where I knew the other’s pet peeve and the other couldn’t hit me. I wasn’t a closeted gay like I was in highschool. Furthermore, Woo Ragi had already seen my memories, so he’d know what kind of person I am.

‘There’s no reason for me to pretend to be someone I’m not… Rather, I feel relieved.’

Since Woo Ragi already hated me so much, I didn’t even think about making a good impression on him; I wasn’t bothered with the idea of upsetting him.

I’ve never felt this way about someone before. It was really my first time dealing with someone I had no desire to get close to and had no need to hide anything from them. In short, in my relationship with Woo Ragi, I had no need to purchase his affection.

Since I didn’t need to make a good impression on him, I could act however I wanted and not walk on eggshells around him. The way I could act made me think that he and I weren’t on equal levels but that I was superior. Actually, I got a sense of liberation from talking to him.

So, as I teased Woo Ragi, I didn’t really detest him all that much nor was I hurt by his words. In fact, I didn’t even take Woo Ragi persistently calling me homo bastard as an insult. I just wanted to humiliate him; I’d be too soft on him if I just allowed him to call me like that.

“Let’s see how long you’ll stay on your high horse.” As expected, anger filled Woo Ragi to the brim, and the man suddenly opened the door and barged out. Seeing as how he didn’t call me a ‘homo bastard’ even though he left like that, I felt so incredibly victorious.

After the door slammed shut with a loud crash, I stopped pulling at my earlobe and released it. “Pfft…” I laughed.

While I smirked, Jung Garam suddenly climbed atop my stomach. “Wow, Choi Lee-kyung! You’re pretty good? You’re crazy good at handling Ragi-hyung.”

“Ngh, so heavy…”

“It’s the first time I’ve seen someone talk to Ragi hyung like that! Actually, I thought you’d be intimidated once Ragi-hyung arrived.”

“Mmm… Was I too harsh?”

“No? It was damn hilarious?”

As Garam talked childishly, I took a careful look at Kim Olim and Seo Dawon; I was surprised to see that both of them were laughing as well.

Since they were friends, I thought they would be disappointed with me… Even the stern Kim Olim tried to stop her laughter by biting her lower lip; Seo Dawon wore a smile that clearly revealed his joy.

The mage said to me, “It’s a relief that you’re getting along with Ragi.”

Woo Ragi shouted, “Piss off!” from outside the room, as if he had heard what Seo Dawon said. After hearing that, we burst into laughter, and the room filled with sounds of delight.

“Honestly, Ragi has the stubbornness of a psycho. No one could win against hyung, you know?”

“Re…Really?”

“Yeah! He’d easily throw a tantrum, so everyone marched to his beat.”

After hearing what Jung Garam said, it wasn’t hard to imagine what Woo Ragi had been like back when he was alive. A man who said whatever he pleased, and a man who was never touched despite what he had said.

‘He was a total jerk…’

“How is it that he couldn’t defy Choi Lee-kyung one inch?”

“……”

There must not have been many people who could ignore Woo Ragi during his lifetime. With such a handsome face, overflowing talent…he didn’t lack in money either…

Since he was the main DPS [2] position in Red Lotus, how many people could ignore his presence in a world where a man of his talents was so rare? Additionally, he was a close friend of Seo Dawon, the guildmaster.

I think if I were him, I would've become a rude person as well. He probably had never been criticized even if he were rude. I'm sure everyone tried their hardest to like him.

However, I didn't intend to bend over backwards for him.

Rather, if I could, I'd rather…

'Hmm… What's that word again? Discipline…? Training…? Educate…?'

In any case, I didn't want to be swayed by him even if I needed to pointedly press him down. So, I simply shrugged my shoulders at Jung Garam's amazement.

TL: I feel like a proud mom T_T

But also, please, pierce that ear.

Footnotes

1. Famous artist who has one ear (he hacked it off himself! Fascinating dude!) Essentially, Woo Ragi is threatening to cut Lee-kyung’s ear off.
2. Damage per second

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Chapter 178

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After gaining a victory over Woo Ragi like that, the house was cleaned shortly afterwards. To be exact, Soe Dawon was the one to destroy it, so he was in charge of restoring the place to its original state.

I dozed a little in bed; Seo Dawon woke me up, so I made my way towards the table. Soon, all the servants gathered in the living room. Woo Ragi, who had been seen for a long while, took a seat at the far edge of the large table. Whenever I wasn't looking at him, he'd send a vehement gaze my way; when I looked up, he looked away. His actions really made me worry about him.

'Why is he looking at me like that, it's making me want to tease him…'

While I took a big bite of the porridge that Seo Dawon made, I looked suddenly at Woo Ragi. I laughed inwardly at the way that the other tried to pretend as if our eyes hadn't met.

However, my prank was stopped when Olim tapped lightly on the table. "This wasn't something I wanted to bring up during your meal, but there's something that bothers me about some actions on Bae Jaemin's side. We've already delayed too much, so listen while you're eating."

"……" I swallowed my porridge and nodded, conveying my agreement.

Seo Dawon, who saw my nod, looked towards Woo Ragi this time. "Do it."

Woo Ragi seemed to have gained some background information from digging through my head, but it was still more important to know exactly

what was going on. However, the truth was such a harsh reality for these people, that I listened to the impassive story that passed back and forth between them with bated breaths.

Contrary to my expectations, Woo Ragi only listened quietly; his only reaction was the way his eyes grew colder.

After the whole explanation finished, He opened his mouth and asked, “Do you find out anything about the assassins that showed up that fated day–especially the guy that used the red daggers that looked like flames?”

“We haven’t investigated that yet. We don’t have a lead to the contracted assassins; there’s no way to contact him.”

“Find out as soon as possible. And, when we deal with that assassin, I want to come out personally like Jung Garam did. No complaints, right?”

“……”

He looked at me for his last statement. I didn’t bother to go against him and nodded.

After Jung Garam murdered Park Hoseok, an implicit rule had been created. They would personally pay back the enemy that landed the final blow on them.

I recalled how strangely devastated I felt when the assassin brought about Woo Ragi’s death. Though I couldn’t experience how Woo Ragi had died from his point of view in his [Vengeful Ghost Memory], but his death scene was still vivid from Seo Dawon’s memories. My fingertips felt numb.

Woo Ragi did not step down or retreat one inch in an unfair fight in which dozens of people rushed in to cut down one person. He knew that if he collapsed it would be his guildmates’ turn. How could I keep him from resolving that resentment?

Perhaps he had not expected my gentle response; his mouth gaped open as he mimicked a fish opening and closing their lips. Then, he grinned.

Perhaps he didn’t intend that grin–his smile quickly disappeared. In anycase, the atmosphere was good as we continued this earnest talk.

“Bae Jaemin had to return from abroad in a hurry due to Park Hoseok’s case. After urgently displaying some sorrow, the guild announced its plan to launch a personal investigation.” Kim Olim looked around at her audience and immediately continued onto the key point. “That seems to have caused some friction between the official investigation team and HaHae. From the official investigation’s standpoint, they don’t want people unrelated to the investigation agency running around; from HaHae’s standpoint, they demand a high-intensity investigation, referring to the official investigation agency’s sluggish pace to gain results. Bae Jaemin hasn’t officially appeared in public yet, but witnesses have stated he’s often coming to Jeju Island.”

After Park Hoseok’s death, there was much talk of a suspect being arrested or that the team was in the middle of investigation, but each suspect arrested was found to have an alibi and had to be released.

To put it simply, it meant that the real criminal hadn’t been caught and the investigation was lost in fog… As the incident had grabbed the whole nation’s attention, even if the case didn’t make the front page every day, articles were still constantly being published. HaHae was strongly pressuring the government by appealing to the media. Bae Jaemin seemed to be able to intervene in this situation since the deceased, Park Hoseok, was a HaHae executive.

The problem, though, is the impact of their confrontation on me.

“That’s why the investigation scope has increased; a notice has been sent to our side detailing a future visit from an investigator. After all, the date of Park Hoseok’s death overlaps with the time we spent in Jeju Island.”

“Huh? Then…Wouldn’t we be at a disadvantage if I say something wrong?”

We committed illegal deeds and I was an accessory to murder, so I used to sweat at the mention of the investigation agency. Still, I took relief in the

fact that no one came to me directly. However, the mention of an investigator's visit had cleared up my drowsiness; I felt my heart pounding.

Kim Olim, who saw my anxious expression, continued, as if to soothe me. "They probably won't investigate you intensely. They probably will think that you couldn't even touch a strand of hair on Park Hoseok's head with your ability."

"That's right, Lee-kyung-ah. You're shabby, remember?" Jung Garam giggled. "No matter what they ask, it's enough to just say 'I can't do that sort of thing?'" I couldn't tell if he was trying to tease me or help me relax; nevertheless, I calmed down a little bit. The thought of my lousy skills being some help made me laugh.

However, when I saw the notice that Kim Olim had placed on the table, I felt strangely anxious yet again.

"Originally, you should have attended immediately after summoning Woo Ragi, but it was postponed since you were admitted to the hospital. Within the next week, orders for you to attend will arrive. There will probably be the expected usual questions, so we'll practice speaking formally. Your alibi has already been created by Koo Hui-seo."

"Whew… Alright."

Fortunately, Koo Hui-seo and the Red Lotus members had fabricated my alibi, creating a schedule of my day. I received the paper, intending to memorize it until my scheduled investigation attendance date.

As soon as Kim Olim finished her explanation, her expression became a little stiff. She started a new topic with a chilly tone, "Ryu Hyerin also returned from abroad."

I paused in the middle of neatly folding the paper I had received; I looked towards Seo Dawon reflexively. He listened to the Paladin, chin in hand, without blinking… The issue was that someone else looked at Seo Dawon like I did.

It was Woo Ragi.

Woo Ragi stared at Seo Dawon; when he turned his head, I could see his complicated expression. My mouth suddenly felt dry.

‘As expected, those two… Hah, damn… Then, why did Ryu Hyerin betray Seo Dawon?’

No matter how Seo Dawon maintained his poker face, my heart strings couldn’t help but be tugged because the mage’s closest friend looked at him with such a meaningful expression.

However, since I couldn’t hold onto Seo Dawon and demand answers, I bowed my head calmly.

Kim Olim calmly continued to speak when silence fell over the table. “Also, the first paparazzi photo taken of Ryu Hyerin after she returned from abroad was at a hotel restaurant with Bae Jaemin. So, the media, lured day in and day out by rumors of Bae Jaemin and Ryu Hyerin’s romantic relationship, is going crazy. The rumors have even been pushing back news coverage on Park Hoseok’s murder case.”

“What?!” I instinctively kicked my feet and sprung out of my seat at the shocking news.

Was this lady, Ryu Hyerin, insane? No, she had betrayed Seo Dawon, but… How could she do that? Did she really not feel an ounce of remorse for Seo Dawon?

“Mm, well they’ve denied the romantic rumors for now, so… Calm yourself and sit down. You’re a bit too agitated.”

As soon as Kim Olim pointed out my behavior, I sat down again. My face flushed red.

As I took a seat, I sneakily glanced around at the others. Jung Garam bit his lips, holding back his laughter; Woo Ragi did not attempt to hide his

contemptful expression. And…I saw Seo Dawon who smiled momentarily when our eyes met. The mage turned to look back at Kim Olim again.

God, I'm so embarrassed.

"However, it's quite meaningful that they keep exposing themselves to the paparazzi. Those in the know would already have realized this, but Users aren't easily exposed by the paparazzi. If they really didn't want to be caught in the open, they could have blocked the media's presence. I think he's using them purposefully."

"I-I see…" Complicated feelings rising up within me, I looked at the picture in the article that Kim Olim had uploaded onto her tablet.

Ryu Hyerin's happy smile and face could clearly be seen, even though the photo was taken from far away. Seo Dawon hadn't paid any attention to the photo, but I couldn't tear my eyes away until the screen was turned off.

TL: Lee-kyung, feeling upset for his mans T_T I wonder what's up with Ryu Hyerin though.

Hello! I'm back and fully rested from the vacation/honeymoon. I've got a few housekeeping announcements to make! I've made a patreon! I was feeling a bit guilty for taking kofi money and not giving anything back (if I can't do regular bonus chapters) so , through Patreon, people can access advance chapters for anyone that wants it. I will still update at a regular speed, though. I'm planning to leave kofi up for any one-off donations people want to make.

https://www.patreon.com/Lil_ValleyTL

I've also made a specific discord for people to discuss stuff, for me to post an upload schedule, and for anyone to ask questions (about me/translation etc). I don't expect it to become a large community haha, but its mostly

there to be a resource for when people want to check when the next update is. The foxaholic discord is definitely still there to join (and I’ll be active in that server as well).

https://discord.gg/c9j7zxvZxJ

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Chapter 179

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‘What did the two gain from pretending to be in a relationship?’

No way, was this a part of the plan to betray Seo Dawon?

However, after yawning for a while, Jung Garam made eye contact with me and said, “I thought Ryu Hyerin didn’t like Bae Jaemin all that much.”

“R-Really?”

“Whenever I criticized Bae Jaemin, she would help out.”

All I knew about Ryu Hyerin was that she was a famous, beautiful ranker that was Seo Dawon’s past fiancée… Desperate for even scraps of information, I urged Jung Garam with my eyes.

But, surprisingly, Woo Ragi was the one to intervene in this conversation. “Didn’t she neither like nor dislike people?”

“She was close with Ragi-hyung too, right?”

“We weren’t close. We just didn’t fight.”

Considering Woo Ragi’s personality, wasn’t even that an amazing feat? Perhaps Jung Garam also had that same thought; the young Assassin began to giggle when we exchanged looks.

Kim Olim, who listened to our conversation quietly, suddenly shut her mouth as if she thought of something. After steeling her resolve, she opened her mouth, “To be honest, Ryu Hyerin is… She was the most ideal person.

She never got agitated at anything and didn’t dislike others easily. Her title, [Opera] guild’s deputy guildmaster, may seem flashy on the outside, but she dealt with many things in the background. Ryu Hyerin always did a good job. She must have been tired, but, if something needed to be done, she’d do it.”

“……”

“It’s honestly not that easy to fulfill all the duties that are expected of your position. I learned a lot from her in that area. We were friends, but I also admired her.”

“……” I was shocked that Kim Olim would use the word ‘admire.’

Soon though, Kim Olim opened her closed eyes, something blue shining within her blood red eyes, and continued, “So, I’m looking forward to slitting her throat. I’ve never seen her be so frivolously startled or seen her make a fuss in all her life. I’ll probably see some of her sincere expressions before she dies.”

“Mm… Then, will noona personally take care of Ryu Hyerin? You made an agreement with Dawon-hyung?”

“That’s right.” Kim Olim nodded. She turned towards my slightly intimidated self. “And, in all honesty, I was still in doubt until we dealt with Park Hoseok. I wasn’t sure if we could accomplish anything.”

“……”

“However, Choi Lee-kyung, you succeeded in resolving Jung Garam’s resentment. I trust you now. Someday, you’ll be able to drag Ryu Hyerin right before me. That hope’s been nurtured.”

“I-Is that so… Actually, I don’t think I did all that much.” I flapped my hands, flustered by such a serious conversation.

Kim Olim denied my words seriously, “We exist because you exist. If it weren’t for you, we would’ve had to accept our destruction or resign

ourselves to a miserable fate. Thanks to you, I was able to retain my rationality.”

“……”

“Maybe it’s ridiculous for me to say this, but…I feel like I’m alive right now. I had thought that only the living were blessed with the ability to enjoy themselves as they imagined their future.” As she said that, Kim Olim showed us a hitherto unseen smile. Deep dimples… A real smile that harmonized nicely with her warm gaze.

I felt a bit embarrassed; my toes curled. However, I couldn’t tear my eyes away from Kim Olim’s face. She was always so stern and serious, but I realized that this innocent smile far suited her actual age. For a brief moment, I caught a glimpse of how she had sparkled during her lifetime.

‘How could Ryu Hyerin kill someone like this?’

Ryu Hyerin must have been familiar with the Kim Olim that could make this kind of expression.

However, her smile disappeared within a minute; She soon returned to her usual stern face and began nagging at me. “So, from now on, work harder in training your physical stamina and take precious care of your body until our revenge succeeds. Also, don’t be too angry about Ryu Hyerin’s business. It’s not time yet… Are you listening? Necromancer?”

“Ah, Mmhm!”

“Your cheeks are red again. Are you feverish again?”

“No, no…! I’m fine!”

I quickly came to my senses after hearing those words…I suddenly made eye contact with Seo Dawon, who was observing my expressions. The Mage smiled brightly, but, for some reason, only his face was smiling. I wondered why he seemed to be in such a poor mood.

In any case, our conversation ended there; Kim Olim handed me a piece of paper meant for tomorrow's investigation appointment. The expected questions were written there. Underneath those were the answers I should give.

"This QnA was created by a lawyer. Koo Hui-seo said that he'd provide a lawyer, but we refused because that might raise some suspicions. Read these answers, memorize them, and then practice answering while giving an appropriate performance."

"There're more answers than I had imagined…"

"You don't necessarily need to memorize everything. The key questions have been marked separately, so it's okay to look only at those."

"Mhmm……" I slowly turned a few pages of the A4-sized packets, reading the questions highlighted in red.

In the afternoon, I ate brunch at XX cafe; the rest of the time, I was supposed to have read books at the villa. I didn't have much of a schedule, so I thought it'd be easier to memorize than I had first imagined.

"Acting…" Seo Dawon said, his words taking on a strange nuance as he watched me eagerly reading the script. Somehow his gaze was gloomy.

Jung Garam turned towards us, "What?"

"Lee-kyung-ie is super bad at acting."

"What?" I asked.

"Pfft hahaha. What are you good at?" Jung Garam laughed.

My temper flared for a moment. However, I remembered how we had confronted Kim Sangyoon in the past, and my mouth closed shut.

At that time, I decided to match Seo Dawon's bad cop act and acted to 'convince' the Mage to let the Warrior's transgressions slide, but I answered everything stiffly like a robot… Fortunately, Kim Sangyoon was a little out

of his mind at the time. If he was in his right senses, however, he definitely would have noticed something strange.

"W-What should we do? What if I–What if they do something because I'm acting suspiciously…"

"How many times have I said you're not a suspect in the first place? On the surface, your ability isn't at a level where you can kill Park Hoseok. Even if you confessed, you'd only be hit with the crime of obstructing the progression of the official investigation."

"Haah…"

Afterwards, Kim Olim soothed me for about an hour, noticing how I had frozen, so my racing heart calmed down a little. But, strangely, my eyes could read none of the words on the paper… Eventually, I stayed up all night, eyes open.

* * *

The next day.

With faraway eyes, I arrived at the 'Hunter Association' branch near the plaza with the servants.

The exterior felt like just another district governmental office building, but the interior was designed to have something like bank teller windows. A wide space in the middle was allocated to receiving civil complaints. Should I say that the scent of civil servants was strong here?

"E-Excuse me… I'm here because of this [Attendance Summons]…"

"Ah, Please wait a minute. The person in charge will be here soon."

The way I was handed a numbered ticket so that I could wait was so similar to other governmental offices. I felt my anxiety subside as I waited for the person in charge.

The other servants were leisurely enough to freely chatter, unmoved by our situation; I gradually regained my calm.

[Clack Clack!]

And, Lackey was within my arms…

When I arrived at a crowded place with Lackey, the skeleton would be unnerved by its surroundings, turning its small head here and there and ferociously observing the environment. Its actions were so cute that I couldn't help but stroke its smooth head. Though the skull was cold and firm, my mood improved whenever I touched it.

"The lead investigator has arrived. I'll guide you; this way please."

When my heart finally calmed, the person in charge arrived, and I was able to be comfortably guided to the reception room.

The reception room was a small room not far from the civil complaint counter; inside I could see a whiteboard, a long table, and a laptop computer on top of that table. Rather than an interrogation, the atmosphere felt more like a meeting room; I released the deep breath I held and sat in a random seat.

As soon as I sat down, I heard a click and the sound of the door opening. I turned to look at the person who entered.

"Hello. I'm the investigator, Moon Issak."

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TL: Choi Lee-kyung has two hands for a reason T_T And one of them belongs to Kim Olim.

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Chapter 180

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The moment my name left the man who entered the reception room's lips, my face probably paled from the amount of blood that trickled away. At first, I couldn't say anything for a few minutes because of the shock; the moment I locked eyes with the man, I felt so overwhelmed I just couldn't open my mouth.

Even though he had a slender physique and an ordinary appearance– nothing extraordinary, my body began to tremble helplessly like a mouse before a tiger's eyes. If Seo Dawon hadn't grabbed onto my shoulder from behind, I might have collapsed to my feet.

Moon Issak scrutinized me, his gaze pushing me down; soon, he adopted an expressionless look, erasing his bloodthirst…As if his force of spirit was some kind of joke. "You're Choi Lee-kyung-ssi, right?"

"Yes… Yes."

"Please, sit down." Then, Moon Issak gently laid the documents, which he had brought under his arm and pinned to his side, atop the desk. I didn't dare defy him and placed my butt straight on the seat.

Afterwards, Moon Issak handed me the documents without a word nor a glance. However, I still sat upright, as if nails had been hammered into my hips, and was wary of the other's actions.

"Why is Moon Issak the one to personally interrogate him?"

"Wow, this bastard's living a long life, huh?"

“Necromancer. Try to keep a straight face.”

“Lee-kyung-ie’s completely frozen?”

[Clack Clack Clack…?]

Behind me, the servants were also surprised by Moon Issak’s sudden appearance. However, they were only flustered for a brief moment. Perhaps they decided to wait and observe; the servants’ behaviors didn’t change much. They must have decided to delay any actions until after determining Moon Issak’s attitude.

A few minutes–which seemed like a thousand years–later, Moon Issak flung me a question while still looking at the documents. Of course, he didn’t forget to turn on the recorder next to him before beginning. “From X day to XX day, you were on Jeju Island for 1 night and two days, correct?” He asked in a professional tone.

Considering how full of anxiety I was, his first question was quite easy.

“Yes…” I cautiously answered.

Moon Issak scarily continued onto the next question as soon as I answered, “But, even though Choi Lee-kyung-ssi isn’t a member of the Red Dragon guild, Koo Hui-seo issued him a special pass that also included flight tickets?”

“Ah…Yes.”

“May I ask why?”

This question had been one expected and highlighted by the lawyer. After a moment of silence, I, careful not to stutter, responded with the memorized answer. “Hui-seo-nim had asked me to aid in the investigation into his missing younger brother’s, Koo Kyungman’s, property. That’s why I went to the villa.”

“An investigation into his assets?”

“He had asked me to go to a villa owned by Koo Kyungman-ssi and find documents held within a private safe there. After all, right now, Koo Hui-seo-ssi can’t move around rashly.”

“Do you mean to say that he asked that of Choi Lee-kyung-ssi and not another guild member?”

“He said he didn’t have many people he trusted because he had just become the guild master.”

“He must trust you very much. As far as I know, the two of you had just gotten acquainted.”

“……”

His words had teeth to them, but I was advised that I had no need to answer questions involving Koo Hui-seo and my friendship. Additionally, the servants behind me tapped my shoulder, meaning ‘You’ve said enough, you don’t need to speak any more.’ So, I took a refreshing breath and was careful not to let my emotions show on my face.

Fortunately, Moon Issak didn’t delve deeper; once again, he began to read the document, flipping through the pages.

However, not long after, he put the pages aside as if he had read through all of them; he looked back towards me and smiled slightly. Of course, I wasn’t comfortable enough to smile back.

Moon Issak stared at me, as if scrutinizing me. As if he were talking to himself, though he was loud enough for everyone to hear, he muttered, “Well, if he was an overwhelmingly sexy person, I would have said maybe Koo Hui-seo just had those kinds of tastes.”

“……”

His tone was rude, but I didn’t dare protest in this atmosphere. I just let that comment pass by while biting my lower lip.

However, I heard unusual sounds from the servants behind me; I flinched and trembled slightly. It sounded like someone was grinding their teeth… Of course, Moon Issak, who couldn't hear that sound, simply rapped the table carelessly with his fingers.

Then, Moon Issak pressed the recorder button again. He stopped the recording. I was uneasy at that action, so I kept my eyes fixed on his sturdy-looking fingers.

Then, in the quieted reception room, he asked in a softer voice, "Actually, there was something else I wanted to ask Choi Lee-kyung-ssi. That's why I came out personally."

"……"

"Do you know a User named Jung Garam?"

His question raised goosebumps on the back of my neck.

It seems that Moon Issak had delved more into this situation than we expected. Of course, I knew that Garam-ie left his signature at Park Hoseok's murder scene, but asking me if I knew Jung Garam was on another level.

Moon Issak must have gotten a lead and believed that I was a connecting factor!

I had no idea how to deal with this. I couldn't say anything and tried to calm down my shaking body. There was no way Moon Issak couldn't have noticed my agitation.

He eventually burst into laughter. "How cute, Choi Lee-kyung-ssi."

"……"

"You don't look like the type to be deeply entangled in these sorts of things… How did you get here?"

It felt as if he were sympathizing with me, but he didn't even try to hide the smirk permeating through his expression. Even though I thought I had already misstepped, I managed to continue with my denial. "…I don't know what you're talking about."

"I have a hypothesis; would you like to listen to it?"

"……"

Moon Issak didn't seem to care about my response. As if he had been set, with or without my answer, he continued in a clear voice. "You know that the Red Lotus had been exterminated one day, long ago, right?"

"……"

"It was very unnatural, though. Well, it wasn't any of my business, but the whole thing smelled fishy."

"……"

"And at that time, there were many businesses related to the Red Lotus; the impact when they had all collapsed with the guild was shocking. Many companies went bankrupt. Since the situation and the entanglement of different interests were so complex, somehow many people became obsessed over finding the truth. Choi Lee-kyung-ssi is probably connected to one of them."

"……."

However, the more Moon Issak spoke the more my anxiety gradually decreased, little by little.

He seemed convinced of his logical flow, but he had no understanding of the Necromancer class nor its skills.

He didn't seem to think that the Red Lotus were resurrected but, rather, that I was involved in working for someone interested in the Red Lotus's extermination. I was shocked when Jung Garam's name left his lips–I thought I'd been caught red-handed…

‘He has gaps…’

Perhaps, Moon Issak’s arrogance can be used.

“On the contrary, as time passed, more people benefited from Red Lotus’s collapse. Some of those people would definitely have been involved in the guild’s extermination.”

“……”

“One of them must be Park Hoseok. Even I think that vaulted [1] man became a big shot after the Red Lotus incident.”

“……”

“Furthermore, Park Hoseok was originally a part of Red Dragon, yes?” With that said, Moon Issak stopped and threw me a look. It was as if he was daring me to try and refute what he said.

If I couldn’t speak properly here, Moon Issak would investigate me at an even higher intensity than before. My mouth felt bone dry and my heart began to pound, but I squeezed out courage from the depths of my stomach and looked straight at him. Moon Issak continued to look at me, unbothered.

I swallowed my dry saliva once and closed my eyes–I thought I’d be caught out in this lie if I were to look into his eyes. Once his gaze was blocked, suppressed the shaking as much as possible, and opened my mouth, “Park Hoseok is…As far as I know, he was Koo Kyungman’s right hand man.”

“You think I wouldn’t know that?”

“That’s why, he went to HaHae under Koo Kyungman’s order.”

“……” Perhaps my words were intriguing, Moon Issak did not respond, urging me with his silence.

I clenched my fists and continued, “However, when Koo Kyungman disappeared, the person who protected Park Hoseok-ssi disappeared. So… From what I know, Park Hoseok tried to entrust his being over to the newly crowned guild master, Koo Hui-seo.”

“He was discovered as a double agent?”

“Yes. We’ve been in discussions, but… Do you know who Park Hoseok met on the day he was murdered?”

“……”

“He had a meal with HaHae’s executives. That’s all I know.”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I wonder who grinded their teeths at Moon Issak’s statement O.O

Footnotes

1. Once again, , a derogatory way to refer to ‘well off’ men…literally meaning ‘nobleman’ was used here.

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Chapter 181

Chapter 181

As I opened my eyes–words all said and done–I saw Moon Issak's crumpled brows. He looked like he was examining the validity of my words.

However, as soon as he made eye contact with me, a grin immediately formed on his face. "It's already been revealed that Park Hoseok had a meeting with the [HaHae] executives that afternoon."

"……"

"You're so clever with your words, Choi Lee-kyung-ssi. Did you appeal to Koo Hui-seo with that tongue of yours?"

'As expected, that wasn't enough…'

However, though Moon Issak showed signs of not fully trusting me, he didn't seem to readily conclude that my words were all a lie.

Perhaps he had doubts about the [HaHae] guild. Perhaps he'd gotten some sort of impression from Bae Jaemin back when the two had a meal together in Ahn Hospital.

'Looking at his attitude, he doesn't seem to be the type to hold a lot of affection for others…'

At first, I thought Bae Jaemin would have made a good impression on Moon Issak, given that both of them were holy-attribute classes and both

were harsh on evil-attribute Users. At that time, Kim Sangyoon had said nothing special had happened.

I didn't know if Moon Issak had actually listened to Bae Jaemin's request, but it would have reached my ears if they had raised their voices or if the meal's atmosphere had been feral. So, I thought Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak would have had a relatively friendly relationship, but…

Contrary to my expectations, though Moon Issak was simply harsh on evil-attributed Users, it didn't seem like he would give unconditional favors for those that shared his class attribute. His attitude or way of speaking did not reveal in any way affection for Bae Jaemin. Nevertheless, seeing how he reacted to the keyword, [HaHae]…

'Maybe… Moon Issak is warier of Bae Jaemin than I had thought.'

In particular, it felt meaningful that he had asked many questions about [Red Lotus's] extermination. Someone who looked favorably upon Bae Jaemin wouldn't say such things.

So, even though it was a gamble, I asked, "Is Investigator-nim also suspicious of Bae Jaemin?"

"We're leaving all the possibilities open. Ah, of course. You're the most suspicious."

"…If so, then have you ever talked about the [Red Lotus] matter with Bae Jaemin-ssi? Have you ever asked him in detail about the <Tower of Command>?"

"What do you mean?"

I swallowed my dry saliva once, before saying, "The bracelet Bae Jaemin-ssi wears on his arm… Ask him who Beatrice originally belonged to."

"……?"

“I don’t know what would happen if anyone else asks, but if Moon Issak, the person that currently holds the investigation rights, were to ask… I’m sure his reaction will be worth a scoop.”

Moon Issak didn’t react much to my words, but I imagined he would soon realize the truth behind them. After all, he was someone with good senses.

As expected, Moon Issak remained silent. Soon, his lips twitched; the temperature in the reception room became so cold–incomparable to the chilliness before. The corners of his lips slowly twisted, and he strode to my seat.

Then, putting his hands on the table and tilting his torso towards mine, he whispered, “Do you know what you’ve just said right now?”

“[Saintess Beatrice’s prayer] is an item that only changes possession upon its former owner’s death. Even if you ask others who the previous owner was, you’d probably get a similar reaction.”

“So, you’re saying you know who the previous owner was.”

“I’m…not yet obligated to answer that.”

“I guess you don’t know that there’s a separate interrogation room in this building’s basement.”

His bloodthirst placed terrible pressure on my chest, but I already noted that he would never hurt me. If this man’s personality would allow him to hurt me now, his actions would have already come before his words.

Just from tales, I could tell just how violent Moon Issak was as a person. So, seeing as how he hadn’t touched one strand of hair on my head, I was certain. My explanation was already settling in.

“However, killing me could only help Bae Jaemin,” I said.

“……”

“And, won’t you always be curious about what you’ve heard from today? You won’t be able to find the answer otherwise. Moon Issak-nim knows this well, right? If you miss this moment, you won’t be able to touch Bae Jaemin, who holds [HaHae] within his hand.”

Since [Red Lotus] was beyond Moon Issak’s interest, the investigator could stand to sit by and simply observe, but he was currently in charge of Park Hoseok’s murder case. Actually, the more he dug into this issue, the more lost he’d become. There was no way he’d kill me–the important key.

I even mentioned Bae Jaemin’s name. From Moon Issak’s perspective, the investigator probably quickly calculated that the successful resolution of this case would uncover one of the most successful ranker’s secrets. Or, perhaps, his weakness.

As expected, he didn’t refute my words and only stared at me, as if urging me to say more. Seeing that, I resolved to properly wedge this suspicion into his head. “If you don’t catch Bae Jaemin properly now, you never know when you’ll meet a fate like Park Hoseok’s. Wouldn’t his innocence be more certain after your death? After all, you have a lot of enemies.”

I spat out my argument almost as if I was calling down curses upon his head. Of course, I didn’t expect Moon Issak to be shaken by this threat. My role, though, wasn’t to scare him, but to light the fire of suspicion in his heart.

Could he, who already had doubts about Bae Jaemin, not respond to the connection of the murder and the mysterious item? Furthermore, the one who brought this matter to him was an incompetent User whose neck could be twisted at any moment; in his view, I was risking my life.

For a few minutes, while Moon Issak opened and closed his mouth several times, I really felt the blood draining out of me. Fortunately, Moon Issak didn’t hesitate for long; soon, the bloodthirst that had filled the reception room was reigned in.

He began using honorifics again, pretending to be polite. “I listened well to your arrogant words.”

“……”

“Choi Lee-kyung-ssi certainly has a uniquely talented tongue.” As expected, Moon Issak was strongly interested in my story; I could feel intense excitement from him. It seemed like all thoughts of jailing me had disappeared.

After overcoming that crisis, I inwardly sighed but took care not to show those emotions on the surface. Moon Issak looked at me, like a predator letting go of a prey he had caught between his teeth–his violent gaze subsided.

However, he continued to add sarcastic remarks. “Coincidentally, I have an appointment with Bae Jaemin in two days.”

“……”

“I can immediately confirm what Choi Lee-kyung-ssi has said the day after tomorrow.”

From our perspective, nothing could be better than Moon Issak directly questioning and confronting Bae Jaemin, so I merely pretended to be calm, returning his stare.

With that said, Moon Issak returned to his original position, cleaned up the scattered paperwork, and stood up. Then, winking, he raised me to my feet.

I followed him, wondering if, finally, this breath-stopping investigation was finally over; before leaving the reception room, the [system] alerted me to a sudden [friend request].

Stammering, I didn’t readily accept the request; Moon Issak stopped before the door, shamelessly looking at me as if he were saying ‘Why haven’t you already accepted it yet?’

“…If you need me, my phone number is…” I muttered.

“This is easier. We can tell each other’s locations straight away as well.”

Of course, I knew the advantages of the [Friend] function in the system. Kim Sangyoon and Koo Hui-seo were added as [friends], and this function had been used plenty. However, because of those benefits, it was difficult to accept Moon Issak’s request–to accept the fact that he’d be able to monitor my location in real-time. It ran counter to our deception.

“Do you make friends with evil-attribute Users?” I asked, grasping at straws. Moon Issak did not drop his smile, for he already guessed at my tricks.

Eventually, I was forced to press the [Accept] button. Well… I could [Unfriend] him later… Of course, I could be suspected and arrested if I was caught. In any case, thinking outside the box, I could also use this to monitor Moon Issak’s location if something were to happen.

“I don’t dislike evil-attribute Users.” Meanwhile, Moon Issak, who just stepped out of the reception room, stopped right before my nose and spoke in a dulcet tone. I looked up at him with a noncommittal though congenial expression. When his gaze met mine, he folded his eyes in a smile. “I loathe them. Therefore, Choi Lee-kyung is a very special person to me.”

“……”

“I hope that in the future your value will continue to trump my disgust. You would also hate to be tortured or live as a cripple for the rest of your life.”

Was there anyone who could stay calm after hearing something like that? Naturally, I froze and paled; Moon Issak laughed out loud at my expression and left the area first.

Become a Patron!

TL: I wanna be a fly on the wall during Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak’s meeting~

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Chapter 182

Chapter 182

I didn’t know what mental state I was in as I exited the building, but when I returned back home, the sigh that I had been restraining was automatically released. At the same time, Jung Garam, who was itching to speak this entire time, jumped on my back. I crumpled to my feet on the carpeted living room floor.

“Choi Lee-kyung! What was that eloquence earlier!! Are you really the nerdy Choi Lee-kyung I know?”

Of course, even if I fell down Jung Garam didn’t care and only spouted what he had to say. If Kim Olim hadn’t lifted the young Assassin by the scruff of his neck, I would have stayed there, laying down underneath the other boy for a while.

“Gahh…” As soon as I could breathe again, I sputtered out some groans and splayed out in the living room. Perhaps I was just too nervous. I had no strength to even stand; my body felt like it was pricked sore.

“Noona, Let me gooo.” [1]

“You’ve overdone it in front of Moon Issak. We should have called a lawyer if you were going to put on airs and speak so obscurely.” Kim Olim looked at me, who was still sprawled out, and spoke harshly. However, it seemed to come from a place of concern rather than her reprimanding me.

Ragi glanced at me briefly before speaking to Seo Dawon. “What do you think Bae Jaemin’s reaction will be?”

“Probably wary–he doesn’t know the extent of Moon Issak’s knowledge.”

“Then, will he make a fuss with Moon Issak?”

“He’ll probably…try to kill him?”

At the mage’s indifferent response, I looked towards him. He calmly added, “After all, if these suspicious trails are caught, one by one, they’ll spin quickly out of control.”

“Should we say it’s like cutting down sprouts? Moon Issak’s not the type of young master to get killed obediently either.”

“That’s right. So, while Moon Issak draws Bae Jaemin’s attention, we’ll have to advance with Kyung-sik’s summoning.”

Everyone fell silent at the mention of a new summons that fell from Seo Dawon’s lips.

Of course, the mage was correct. We still had more servants to summon, and it would be advantageous to proceed while Moon Issak and Bae Jaemin were distracted with each other.

However, since I had suffered physical damage for the first time with Woo Ragi’s summon, measures for further Vengeful Ghost Memories had not been discussed yet. Nevertheless, pushing ahead despite all that would be…

‘The most important thing to Seo Dawon is…’

It was definitely revenge and resurrection, right?

Even though this was an obvious fact, an unintelligible sorrow formed within me. Not wanting that sorrow to be noticed by the mage, I immediately followed up with a contradictory statement, “I’d be fine with that! But, to summon a new servant, my level is still…” I pretended to be completely fine and agreed.

However, Seo Dawon, who looked as if he had more to say, looked at me briefly, stopped his train of thought, and replied, “We probably exhausted all the level-ups that could arise from these sorts of summonings. You had no level-ups while Woo Ragi was summoned, right?”

“Ah, that’s right…”

“Things have changed, starting from Ragi’s summoning. The conditions have become more severe. Previously, you could easily access the [Vengeful Ghost Memories] with just a little bit of your blood, but now it seems you’ll need way more blood or mana.”

Then, not that I remember this past revival fully, will I have to follow the summoning method and lose pints of blood yet again? This time, I hesitated a little because my well-being and physical condition had yet to fully recover.

As if he had perceived my worries, Seo Dawon responded, “We’re not going to use your blood for summonings anymore. Kyung-sik’s summon is likely to be more dangerous than Woo Ragi’s.”

“Then…”

“I’m thinking about using a different sacrifice.”

Was that why he so confidently suggested summoning another servant? I was relieved on one hand and curious as to the ‘different sacrifice’ on another. When it came to black magic offerings, plenty of creepy things came to mind.

Ding Dong–

“…Huh?”

At that moment, the doorbell suddenly rang. Since I had no one slated to visit, I looked around at the servants.

Seo Dawon nodded his head and said, “Just in time–the sacrifice is here.”

"…What?"

The mage, acting naturally as if some parcel delivery man had arrived, hurriedly motioned for me to stand up. I ran to the intercom to investigate who had come to the door.

However, when I saw the visitor's face on the intercom's screen, I looked at the mage with a dumbfounded face. "W-Wait a minute… That's Koo Hui-seo?"

* * *

Clearly visible in the intercom screen was Koo Hui-seo, wriggling his hands and standing with cheeks stained red.

He was holding a bouquet big enough to cover his face… I held onto the hope that the flower bouquet would be the sacrifice and turned towards Seo Dawon.

However the Mage, as if he were evaluating meat displayed at a market, said, "Koo Hui-seo is a flawless specimen as a sacrifice. He's got witch's blood flowing through him; he's been exposed to black magic for a long time, making his blood easy to process. It would be nice if we could pull out his eyes or heart, but, for the time being, he's more helpful to us alive…"

Seo Dawon spoke so placidly, I thought I heard him wrong. Of course, I didn't like Koo Hui-seo much either…still, I'd never thought of another human being like some meat on sale.

So, I hurriedly cut off the Mage and asked him once more, "No, wait! Did you even discuss this with Koo Hui-seo? He's given permission?"

"What are you talking about?"

“You want his blood…”

“Do I need his consent? He’s your slave anyway.” The mage’s words were unbelievably calm.

Meanwhile, Koo Hui-seo kept ringing the doorbell [dingdong dingdong dingdong], urging us to open the door. Come to think of it, would someone ring the doorbell with such excitement if he knew the people behind the door were aiming for his blood…? It was obvious that he came here in such a good mood without knowing anything…

Head aching, I pressed the connect button on the intercom, trying to at least stop the doorbell sound. Ignorant to my emotions, Koo Hui-seo greeted me in an excited voice as soon as the call connected.

[Ah, Good day… Lee-kyung-ssi…]

I felt even more pity for his ignorant voice, whose words trailed and lilted a little at the end of his words. Even though I knew he was an untreatable pervert…

I first blocked the intercom transmitter with my palm and asked Seo Dawon another question. “His blood… How much do you need?”

“About 1.5 or more liters.”

Wasn’t that a lot? 2 liters would usually be enough to cause death by excessive bleeding.

However, none of the other servants seemed to share my opinion of how cruel this situation was. I chewed my lower lip and pleaded to Seo Dawon, “Do we… have to harvest it all in one day?”

“It’s more convenient to have it all done in one day.”

“No, so what I’m saying is… If Koo Hui-seo-ssi dies or is admitted to the hospital…it won’t be good for us either…”

“I won’t let him die. We still need the [Red Dragon] guild master seat.”

“B-but… if Koo Hui-seo came here without knowing anything, and we only bleed him dry…he may harbor some negative feelings towards us…”

“……”

Even though I was saying such obvious things, I felt so upset that the servants looked at me with expressions that seemed to say, ‘and why should we concern ourselves with that?’ They truly didn’t treat Koo Hui-seo like another human being…

“Tch, so you find him pitiful, huh?” It felt as if Jung Garam sympathized, but then he pretended to wipe away his tears. “Sniffle Sniffle… We have no blood to give since we’re dead…” His tone was incredibly effective in twisting others’ words into trash.

“That’s not what I meant…!”

“If you ask Koo Hui-seo for his blood, he’ll gladly give it to you.”

“What?”

“The reason why I felt no particular need to ask was because it was obvious I would have no need to do so,” Seo Dawon added, overly confident. I looked doubtfully at Seo Dawon, but the mage remained unshaken.

Eventually, I couldn’t maintain this stalemate and opened the front door. Ignorant to my inner thoughts, Koo Hui-seo rushed in, almost kicking the door in his eagerness, and stood in front of me without stopping his stride. “It’s been a long while…”

I felt even more stifled at the sight of him handing over the bouquet, but… In anycase, there was no one else to pose the question if not for me. So, I looked down at the flowers, closed my eyes, and opened my mouth. “Excuse me… Hui-seo-ssi.”

“Ye-es.”

“I’m sorry, but… by any chance… Do you have any thoughts of sharing your blood with me?”

“Ye-es.” Koo Hui-seo answered without even a second of hesitation. I sighed and looked at him once more. No matter how I stared, judging by his blank expression, it didn’t seem as if he properly understood my question.

“Excuse me… Please listen to me seriously,” I said.

“I was listening, though…”

“…I need a lot of blood. You might even faint.”

“Are you planning on using it for summoning?”

I inadvertently opened my eyes wide at the other’s words.

Koo Hui-seo flushed shyly while looking at me… “I’m jealous. If I were to die, it would be nice to be summoned by Lee-kyung-ssi…”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Koo Hui-seo never learns, and Seo Dawon is stone cold.

Footnotes

1. Garam is trying to act cute here.

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Chapter 183

Chapter 183

Koo Hui-seo spoke as if he knew everything. Therefore, I retreated as many steps as he approached me.

Koo Hui-seo stared at me before smiling incomprehensibly. “Why…? Does Lee-kyung-ssi also hate me because I’m dirty…”

“It’s not because you’re dirty… More than that, how much do you know?”

“About what?”

“About the servants… Did Chairwoman Shin talk to you about it?”

“……” Koo Hui-seo adopted an expression that belied his ignorance and looked behind me. It was as if he were staring at the servants standing behind me.

I watched his gaze nervously. Koo Hui-seo, in a tone that still conveyed he had no idea what I was talking about, continued to speak slowly. “Those lumps, every day they would follow Lee-kyung-ssi. Well, it’s not like I can see them clearly, but…”

“……”

“I felt a violent energy from them… And since Lee-kyung-ssi is a Necromancer… I assumed they might be vengeful ghosts contracted to you.”

Even though he had such a blank expression, his words hit the nail on the head. I looked back at Seo Dawon, my eyes pleading at him to decide on our next actions.

“It’s alright, Lee-kyung-ah. Summon me.”

“… [Seo Dawon.]” Left with no choice, I followed Seo Dawon’s suggestion and summoned him.

The mage’s outline next to me slowly filled in with vibrant colors. When his shadow, created by the lighting near his feet, was finally formed, Koo Hui-seo looked at Seo Dawon emotionlessly. “Hello…?”

“If you had noticed what I was to some extent, you should have been quick to talk about it.”

“You’re trying to offset towards Lee-kyung-ssi during summoning with my blood?”

“That’s right.”

The two talked without much agitation from either side–to the point where I, who had been a ball of anxiety, had relaxed.

However, unlike before when Koo Hui-seo was so eager to give blood, he suddenly rolled his eyes and looked at me. As if he had no desire to talk to Seo Dawon.

“Do you… have anything you’d like to say?” I asked.

“If I were to give you my blood, will Lee-kyung-ssi do anything for me?”

“Lee-kyung-ie was the one to stop me from just grabbing you and digging out your eyes.”

“……”

Seo Dawon immediately squashed his superficial question, but, when I saw Koo Hui-seo's sunken eyes, I felt guilty. It was true that Koo Hui-seo had helped us a lot.

So, after looking at the mage once, I sighed and replied to Koo Hui-seo. "… Nothing perverted, but, if there's anything you want, I'll listen."

"This isn't the time to pretend to be nice." Woo Ragi remarked sarcastically behind me. Of course, I also began to regret my words as soon as Koo Hui-seo's eyes began to sparkle excessively…

"T-Then… Will you come by my house next Sunday?"

"Absolutely not." The mage said.

"Without Seo Dawon-ssi…"

Seo Dawon refused, as if there was nothing more that he needed to hear from Koo Hui-seo, but I observed the guild master's desperate face.

It was difficult to turn a blind eye to Koo Hui-seo's gaunt cheeks; when I lowered my gaze I even saw his bitten fingernails on both hands. I have to ask someone who looked like that to give me all that blood in one go…

"You won't do anything weird? Anything perverted?" I asked.

"Lee-kyung-ah."

"Yes…! Yes, yes!"

"I'll be back home by five pm that day. If I'm to go, you can't cling onto me or confine me. At five, you must return me home."

"Of course…" Koo Hui-seo's two cheeks shined brightly with joy. Seo Dawon's eyes, pleading me not to agree, pierced me in the back of my head, but I eventually nodded.

I made that decision because I thought it'd be better to neatly detail the deal with Koo Hui-seo, but it was painful to be glared at by someone I

liked. I couldn’t even bear to look at the Mage and could only mouth, ‘sorry…’ to him.

“Fine. On Sunday, I’ll go to Koo Hui-seo-ssi’s house.”

“I-I then… Will Lee-kyung-ssi come alone?”

“…Fine.”

At this response, the servants who were watching with their arms folded across their chests began to try to dissuade me.

“……”

“Choi Lee-kyung, are you crazy?”

“Your liver’s come out of your stomach.” [1]

“That was a rash response, Necromancer.”

Of course, I expected their dissent. We already know how bizarrely Koo Hui-seo acted around me.

However, because the other couldn’t hurt me due to the contract conditions and because I had prevented his perverted behavior just now, I thought it wasn’t likely for there to be a big issue. Also, I wanted to ask why he invited me to his home while wringing his trembling, anxious hands…

‘As expected, this is a gamble…’

Still, I didn’t want to regret my decision, but, when I looked up to see Seo Dawon avoiding my eyes, I wanted to cancel my offer immediately.

‘Haah…’

I inwardly sighed deeply and stepped aside, allowing Koo Hui-seo to enter. Koo Hui-seo stepped through the threshold, wearing the brightest smile I had ever seen on him.

* * *

Afterwards, Seo Dawon was frighteningly quiet and made Koo Hui-seo stop in the living room. The Mage roughly grabbed and stood Koo Hui-seo's thin body, making the guild master stagger; however, Koo Hui-seo maintained a despicably cheeky and nonchalant smile. It was as if he was purposefully drawing Seo Dawon's ire…

'If he keeps on acting like that, what's he going to do if Seo Dawon stabs him painfully…?'

Could I say the guildmaster was courting punishment? Seo Dawon placed Koo Hui-seo in the middle of the living room, and, as if giving him a command, said "Take your top off."

"Urghh… Supply without demand…" Jung Garam, standing behind me, grumbled something strange and retreated. I also wondered if I should turn my head away because Koo Hui-seo dithered while looking at me. As expected, it must feel uncomfortable changing clothes in front of others?

"If you look at me like that… I'll get excited…"

"Understood, damn it."

However, rather than being embarrassed, Koo Hui-seo twisted his closed thighs together oddly. Fed up and annoyed, I turned my back and stood looking the opposite way. I heard the soft rustling of thin clothes disrobing, and silence fell over the living room soon afterwards.

Strangely though, the room's atmosphere changed a little after he took off his top.

The other servants were staring at Koo Hui-seo, so I thought they'd start ridiculing him or say mean things for no reason. However, it was strange to see their mouths closed–their eyes unable to tear away from his body.

In particular, Kim Olim, standing right next to me, looked a little shell-shocked; a firm expression returned to her face when she felt my eyes on her, though.

‘What’s this? Is there something on Koo Hui-seo’s body…?’

I was curious, but I remained silent and still–I thought it’d be too ridiculous for me to look after I had already turned around. Not long after, the faint scent of blood began wafting around the tips of my nose.

Almost simultaneously, the golden lines on the living room floor, shining bright into my eyes, were slowly rising upwards. I stood at the edge of the magic circle, and I had no idea what state Koo Hui-seo and Seo Dawon were in…But, I couldn’t afford to look at them because I was reeling from the gust of winds blowing against my back.

As I kept almost falling forward, Woo Ragi looked annoyed. He grabbed at my collar with two fingers–with enough force to strangle my neck.

“Cough…!”

“Don’t make a fool of yourself and cling onto me because you’re about to fall.” Ragi said.

“W-Who would…! More than that, my neck hurts…!”

“Don’t whine.”

That bastard must think he’s doing me a huge favor, but, from my point of view, it would be better to just roll over from that strong wind. Until Jung Garam came from nowhere to hug me, I gulped in gasps of air, strangled.

Plop–

Finally, the golden light that filled every crevice of the living room vanished, and the faint blood smell faded as if it had been washed away.

The wind pushing at my back stopped completely, so I was able to stand properly, back upright, without the help of these two. Woo Ragi made a

show of shaking off his fingers, and Jung Garam leaned against me, hanging off my waist.

I stumbled under Jung Garam's weight and barely managed to look back. Behind me were Koo Hui-seo, who now was fully clothed, Seo Dawon, standing with his eyes closed, and a brilliant crimson jewel floating between them.

'That jewel is probably something that contains Koo Hui-seo's blood, right?'

I glanced once more at the fist-sized jewel before observing Koo Hui-seon again. Since he originally had such pale white skin, it was hard to properly assess his condition. His expression didn't change much either… I guess he's alright?

"I-Is it over?"

"Yeah."

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung-ie asserting himself and going against Dawon >.< Honestly I would trust Koo Hui-seo as far as I could throw him with my noodly weak arms. However, it's good that Lee-kyung is pressing his own agency.

RIP Hui-seo though. Seo Dawon looks mad.

Footnotes

1. Liver is often a synonym for bravery or similar emotions in Korean language. So here, saying one's liver can be seen outside (or is out of one's stomach) means that they're being foolhardy/arrogant/overconfident. As an aside, Liver is used in sayings just as how the 'heart' is used in sayings in the English language!

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Chapter 184

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As Seo Dawon answered, he reached his hand out. The crimson jewel slowly landed on his palm.

However, as soon as Seo Dawon received the jewel, Koo Hui-seo, who seemed fine earlier, suddenly began to stumble. Flinching, I approached him and tried to support his weight. But because Jung Garam didn't let go, I couldn't take another step.

"Don't come here, Lee-kyung-ah." Surprisingly, it was Seo Dawon who grabbed Koo Hui-seo's arm. After stopping me, he lifted the gradually drooping Koo Hui-seo and allowed the guildmaster to lightly lean against him. As soon as it seemed like Koo Hui-seo was calmly held against his side, I suddenly heard the clothes swelling behind his back and something bursting out.

Following that, black string-like things began indiscriminately popping out from Koo Hui-seo's back. It was as if a black firecracker had exploded from his body.

"I-Is he okay?" I asked.

"Choi Lee-kyung, back off."

The servants obviously had little interest in Koo Hui-seo's grave appearance. I was plenty worried that the other would die if the situation continued, but Jung Garam pulled me away, widening the distance between us and Koo Hui-seo.

Slither–

‘What is that…’

At that moment, the limp black strings suddenly made strange noises, wriggling on the floor before slowly rising up.

Because Koo Hui-seo still seemed unconscious, the strings felt like separate creatures with their own sentience. Furthermore, the strings slowly bent their heads and became hook-shaped; Seo Dawon, who had been supporting Koo Hui-seo all this while, began to bind the other’s arms together.

“W-What is that?”

“So, that’s why I’m saying to not get close. Sloppy people like you will get hunted.”

When I shouted in surprise, Jung Garam rebuked me–his tone seemed to ask if I now understood the reason for his strict hold.

‘…Then, isn’t Seo Dawon in a lot of danger?’

I looked towards Seo Dawon urgently, observing the strings that began to constrict his torso. However, whether or not Seo Dawon noticed my anxiety, the Mage calmly grabbed the guild master’s arm and dragged him onto the sofa.

Slitherrrr— Slither–

Even then, the black strings climbed up Seo Dawon’s torso, wriggling through his shirt collar and going through his sleeves. The strings suddenly became pliable, like fingers, and began to unbutton the Mage’s shirt, one by one.

‘….Mm?’

What? Why is it unbuttoning his shirt?

“Gah, why the buttons…!” Anger suddenly swelled within me, and I inadvertently shouted out. Seo Dawon glanced at me, chuckled a little, and

soon, in one movement, tore off the strands that were annoyingly attached to his body.

Its durability must be worse than I had thought. Shortly after being ripped off, the black strings strands quickly fell to the ground, transformed into black smoke, and disappeared.

However, there were still a lot of black tentacles remaining from Koo Hui-seo's back; the wriggling mass insidiously hovered near Seo Dawon.

Seeing that, Jung Garam poked me in the ribs, "Choi Lee-kyung, are you a fool? If you just left it alone, you would have had a chance to see hyung's naked body."

"No need, alright? I don't want to see it in that manner…"

"You didn't deny wanting to see him naked, though, huh?"

I pushed Jung Garam and his accurate read away. During that time, though, I met Woo Ragi's contemptuous gaze. He looked as if he were seeing a pervert–there were no words to describe how unfair it felt when I saw his expression. Honestly, it's not like I brought this topic up first…

While I was feeling unfairly wronged, Seo Dawon continued to be grabbed by the black strings. Seo Dawon wrinkled his forehead, as if he were annoyed, but ignored them and raised one hand above Koo Hui-seo's chest.

As soon as he did that, the black strands covered Seo Dawon's arm, as if the Mage had been snared in a trap; they began to tighten tightly. The force was such that I was worried the Mage's arm would break, Seo Dawon simply uttered a skill. "[Purify]."

As golden light flowed from Seo Dawon's palm, Koo Hui-seo's blue lips gradually returned to its original pink. Even the guild master's breathing, which was hard to hear before, could be heard.

I felt relieved–at a surface glance, it seemed as if Koo Hui-seo had recovered somewhat. The black strands continued to grasp Seo Dawon's arms like an anaconda, strangling the breath from its prey.

"Do we have to cut those off?" Kim Olim asked.

"…Leave them alone for a moment. It'd be counterproductive to disturb him now."

After watching quietly, Kim Olim asked her question while fiddling with the handle of the sword on her waist with one thumb, but Seo Dawon shook his head, turning his frustrated gaze upon her.

Soon, coughing, Koo Hui-seo woke up. "Hnngh…. Hm…?"

"Your tentacles. Sheathe them."

"……"

However, even as Koo Hui-seo returned to his senses, he looked around with an expression that belied his confusion towards his situation–why he was slumped.

I had experienced the same in the hospital room recently, so I was sympathetic to his befuddlement, but… Seo Dawon suddenly slapped Koo Hui-seo's cheeks. I gasped in shock, startled by the sudden violence.

Even though that slap may be to return him to consciousness…Was it okay to wake someone who had collapsed from anemia like that? His ruthless side–something I haven't seen in a long time–made me uncomfortable.

However, Koo Hui-seo, the one that hit, blinked blankly without a word of protest, as if he was familiar with this sort of treatment. He slowly stood up; simultaneously, the tentacles holding onto Seo Dawon's arm loosened, one by one.

When the tentacles completely released him, the Mage opened and clenched his fist; he walked a couple of steps away from Koo Hui-seo.

Slither–

The black strings, which looked a bit like electric wires when relaxed and stretched out, began crawling towards Koo Hui-seo's back. Gradually, the strands became shorter until they disappeared behind him.

Looking at that sight, Jung Garam giggled, "It's like he vacuumed up some electrical wires."

"I-If you say that, it's a bit…" Of course, I had similar thoughts…

In any case, I glanced at Koo Hui-seo's slightly swollen cheek before going into my room, bringing out the cardigan I had been wearing. I carefully handed it to the guildmaster, who had been staring blankly at the ground. I was still concerned about the recently released black tentacles, but Seo Dawon didn't stop me after seeing me move. Therefore, it didn't seem dangerous.

Koo Hui-seo stared at the cardigan in my arms before looking up at my face.

"You should wear it." I said.

"It's cold…"

He's cold? I checked over the guild master once more at his unexpected remark. I belatedly realized that one's body temperature would be affected after being drained of a great amount of blood.

With an apologetic heart, I wrapped the cardigan around Koo Hui-seo and started walking towards the kitchen to bring him some warm water. Suddenly, something cold–like ice–touched my wrist.

Koo Hui-seo trembled and held my wrist. Simultaneously, Seo Dawon approached us, but I didn't remove the guild master's hand. Instead, I laid my hand atop his.

Koo Hui-seo's attitude was quite strange though; though he was the one to first grab onto me, he flinched as if my hands were fire before looking at

me in amazement. He opened his mouth as if he were about to say something, but eventually said nothing and placed more power behind his skinny fingers.

“Why don’t you drink some warm water? I’ll bring some for you.” I said.

“I’m…fine.”

“Aren’t you dizzy?” Even if Hui-seo-ssi had a peculiar constitution… this must have been difficult.

“……” Koo Hui-seo blinked while staring at me. Was that his way of telling me that he was fine?

“Ha…” In front of us, Seo Dawon sighed deeply. Somehow I felt like he was sighing at me, but… the Mage said nothing in the end. I must have violated some unsaid conventions.

Koo Hui-seo held onto me for a long while, and, all at once, jumped up from his seat. Then, he released his hand that had become lukewarm.

“Are you okay now?”

“Yees…” Koo Hui-seo responded, his expression blank as usual.

‘He recovered so quickly?’ I was alarmed at his amazing recovery speed.

After answering, Koo Hui-seo looked at me for a long while; the cardigan I had dressed him in began ripping at the seams. Because I had no intention of getting it back from him anyway, I paid it no mind.

When I said nothing, Koo Hui-seo calmed his wringing hands. Then, he called out to me in a pleading voice, “Lee-kyung-ssi…”

“Yes.”

“You don’t…smell something strange from me…?” He asked, randomly. I immediately sniffed at the surroundings. The servants had

previously told me that they smelled something bad from Koo Hui-seo, so I was a little curious…

However, this time as well, I couldn't grasp a single bad stench–except for the slight scent of wood and grass, I smelled nothing. Rather, it was as if he had been scented with perfume…

Well, the servants wouldn't point the smell out for no reason… I just assumed it was a scent I wouldn't be able to perceive, and I wasn't so concerned…

First, I replied honestly, "I don't smell anything."

"…Then, Lee-kyung-ssi can't smell himself, right?"

"What? Do I smell?"

"Yees…" Koo Hui-seo told me that he smelled something strange from me!

I didn't expect to hear such a thing; flustered, I raised my arm to sniff at it. However, there was no odor except for the slight scent of sweat. "I-Is it severe?"

"Well…? At times, it's worse than now."

What?

Koo Hui-seo spoke casually, but I was shocked. It was the first time I've heard I smelled.

Almost involuntarily, I looked towards the servants… When I locked gazes with Jung Garam, he opened his eyes innocently; Kim Olim closed hers and crossed her arms.

And Woo Ragi…

"You didn't know?"

“……”

He completely blocked his nose while smirking at me.

Then, I looked up at Seo Dawon desperately. He stared back without avoiding my gaze.

“D-Does it really smell that bad?” I asked.

Even Seo Dawon, my last hope, crooked the corners of his lips and smiled. “Enough that it’s hard to endure.”

Become a Patron!

TL: I’ve got a theory that the ‘smell’ that comes from both Koo Hui-seo and Lee-kyung is actually the stench of death. Dunno if I’m right though.

Also, >.< The hamster can’t stop being nice. My heart~
I know I wouldn’t be so kind to Koo Hui-seo.

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Chapter 185

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Leaving behind my shocked self, Koo Hui-seo staggered to his feet. Before leaving my home, he said, “You must come on Sunday, okay?”

I barely managed to see him off; as soon as Hui-seo left, I ran from the front door and blocked Seo Dawon’s way. After all, an important issue had remained.

“Is there really some smell emanating from me?” I asked.

“You can’t smell it either way–what would change if I explained it?”

“Because I’m bothered, of course…!”

“I didn’t know you cared that much about me.” Seo Dawon slyly grabbed my shoulder and gently pushed me along. It seems he was still a little upset about what I had promised Koo Hui-seo a while ago, ignoring the Mage.

At those words, I was struck speechless. Retreating, I hit the sofa and sat right there, dazed. At that moment, Seo Dawon, casting a shadow directly above me, smiled as our eyes met. “I’ll make sure you don’t smell after Kyung-sik-ie is summoned.”

“…Is that possible?”

“I’ll make it so bastards like Koo Hui-seo won’t be able to smell it.”

That nuance… It felt as if the Mage was more upset at the fact that Koo Hui-seo could perceive my scent.

As I was about to say that wasn’t the point, Seo Dawon spoke first, “Reach out your palm.”

“Huh?”

“The contract.”

…Right now?

I was bewildered, but my body followed his order and stuck a hand out. Seo Dawon lightly pressed my palm with his finger and drew a cross, the Chinese character for 10. Exactly the shape that would have been drawn with a dagger.

“Nngh…”

“Does it hurt? It shouldn’t.”

“Ah, it doesn’t hurt… Just surprised.”

After all, how could the gentle touch of a finger break skin? In reality, I was flustered because, just as Seo Dawon said, nothing hurt. Looking closer, his fingertips glowed with a faint light–that was probably a skill.

“Contracts including sacrifices proceed in a slightly different way.”

“R-Really?”

“Yeah. Here, hold it tightly with both hands.”

During our conversation, a new magic circle, making vibrating sounds, shined beneath the sofa I was sitting on. Seo Dawon handed me the crimson stone comprised of Koo Hui-seo’s compressed blood; as I did as the Mage said, the blood began to flow out of my clasped hands.

‘…Huh?’

When I grabbed the stone, I felt uneasy. It was a bit lukewarm in temperature and, furthermore, the stone seemed to pound and beat as if I

was holding a heart. Surprised, my shoulders flinched; Seo Dawon gently pressed my shoulders down and whispered for me to calm down. “His pulse is directly transmitted from this. Breathe deeply and take your time.”

“Whew…” Whenever I slowly exhaled, the stone subtly glowed crimson. It was as if I was holding some red light.

Seo Dawon kept his eyes trained on the light-filled stone and informed me of the correct timing. “It’s now. Take out the [Vengeful Ghost Essence].”

Just as he said, I took out Choi Kyung-sik’s [Vengeful Ghost Essence] from my inventory.

As if the [Essence] was the last piece of the puzzle, the magic circle’s state was drastically transformed as soon as it was taken out of the inventory. Piercing my eyes, the light exploded like a bomb; as soon as the pouring light made me close my eyes, the mechanical ping of the [System Message] rang in my ear.

[You’ve achieved conditions for Vengeful Ghost summoning.]

[Vengeful Ghost Summoning Penalty has been offset by ‘Contaminated Blood.’]

[Certain essential conditions for Vengeful Ghost Summoning have been substituted with ‘Contaminated Blood.’ Summoning difficulty has been increased.]

[New methods of sacrificial summoning have been added to your unique skill.]

[Your Servant ‘Seo Dawon’ has been acknowledged for his outstanding ability, devising auxiliary summoning magic circles and sacrificial summoning methods. As a reward, Servant ‘Seo Dawon’s’ magic power has been increased by 10%]

[A new clause, ‘Control,’ has been added.]

[As the servant, ‘Seo Dawon,’ increases in ability, the amount of control the master, you, can exercise over ‘Seo Dawon’ decreases.]

[If the master’s degree of control falls below a certain threshold, then the Vengeful Ghost cannot be summoned. Please be cautious.]

[Activating memory playback of the deceased, ‘Choi Kyung-sik’.]

‘…What?’

Perhaps because the method used this time was different, new conditions were added instead of the familiar messages that denoted a memory playback. I wanted to check on those additions, but I felt like I was thrown off of a rollercoaster and soon lost consciousness.

* * *

“Gasp!” When I woke up from this endless nightmare of continuously falling, I was laying in some unfamiliar bedroom. The air was cold–but not exactly refreshing. Recoiling from the cold, I stood up from the bed and looked around; it was such a huge room that I could only describe it as ‘grand.’

“…Where am I now?”

Furthermore, I felt a similar dissonance to when I had summoned Woo Ragi. That feeling was comparable to when, in Woo Ragi’s [Vengeful Ghost Memory], I experienced the incongruity of returning to my younger self.

“I-Is anyone there…?”

This time around, without Seo Dawon sitting in the seat behind me, I was literally alone inside a spacious bedroom.

After I stopped shyly and awkwardly looking for people, I looked around the room; the interior was incredibly luxurious and simultaneously intimidating in its opulence. The duvet was made of orange silk, detailed with one tiger in all of its majesty; all the furniture in the room was splendidly flashy.

The painting hanging beside the bed also seemed to be some modern art… At least it seemed to be modern art, but, even to an outsider like me, the aura emanating from the black and red painting was unusual.

‘If I slept with this above my head, I’m worried I’d get sleep paralysis…’

My eyes grew exhausted looking at the painting, so I crossed the marble floor and headed towards the door. I had a strong feeling that I had to exit this room. If my premonitions were correct and this was similar to Woo Ragi’s [Vengeful Ghost Memory], then I might be placed in a tough situation if the room’s owner were to enter.

‘Maybe… Is this room Seo Dawon’s room back in his Red Lotus days?’

As I had that thought, before I opened the door, I glanced around the bedroom again. I had remembered that, following the pattern from before, Seo Dawon appeared shortly after I woke up.

I began to think that it was plausible for this to be Seo Dawon’s room. Rather than some common person, this room suited a person like Seo Dawon…

‘Though, it’s a bit too much…’

However, I felt no other presence while I was lost in contemplation.

Eventually, I cautiously opened the door and exited the bedroom. The hallway walls and floor were similar to the bedroom and lined with marble. Large and small paintings hung uniformly on the wall. And, when I finally came to the living room of this spacious house…

“Hnngh!”

“Oh my, have you woken?”

Some lady was cleaning up. I was so surprised I inhaled my breath, but she simply smiled and greeted me. It was as if she knew me well.

“I’ve just finished cleaning now. Should I prepare breakfast for you?” She said.

“Ah. A-About that…” Flustered, I stood straight. A puzzled look overtook the lady’s kind face. “No… ma’am.” I continued. [1]

“Understood. I’ll come again tomorrow morning.”

“Yes…” I was nervous because I didn’t know what variables would change with my actions, and, because I didn’t want to raise her suspicions, I refused her offer. After a polite parting greeting, the lady disappeared into the hallway, and I was left alone in this clean and luxurious living room.

“What on earth…”

A lush forest and lake could be seen from the living room’s open window.

‘The view is good, everything’s good, but… Where the heck am I supposed to find Choi Kyung-sik?’

Faced with a helpless situation, I suddenly suffered a headache; I grabbed my head in reaction. Suddenly, a strange dissonant feeling passed through me–my own appearance, reflected in the window, was a stranger to me.

Startled, I immediately lowered my gaze and observed my hands. It was pale and beautiful, but… It was clearly different from the hands I remembered.

“These aren’t… my hands?” I mumbled dumbly. For a while, I couldn’t come to my senses; goosebumps crawling up, I ran to any random doors and opened them.

The second door I opened contained a shower; I ran inside the bathroom and looked into the mirror. The man I saw when I looked into the mirror shocked me so much I couldn’t even shout.

“How did this…Why?”

The face in the mirror–the wide eyes staring back at me–surprisingly belonged to Jung Garam.

Become a Patron!

TL: Seo Dawon’s dislike of Koo Hui-seo being able to smell Lee-kyung’s scent gives credence to some of the reader’s comments in the previous chapter!

Also >.< Welcome to the next arc you guys! Chapter 200 is coming up at some point. Once again, I wanted to do a poll for who’s your fave (human) character. I feel like if I put up Lackey, the skeleboi would win. This is just an advance notice–the actual poll will come later, after you meet a few more characters!

Footnotes

1. Ma’am isn’t actually used here, but the ma’am would be replaced by a signifier to show respect in the original. There’s no equivalence, so I just used ma’am to show formality and respect.

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Chapter 186

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Pale with fright, I fumbled at my face. Inside the mirror, Jung Garam began to similarly fumble at his face.

‘This just isn’t right!’

Aghast, I approached one step closer to the mirror and touched it. However, the smooth coldness underneath my fingertips made things clear. Moreover, Jung Garam, within the mirror, reached out as well.

Afterwards, I slapped and pinched my cheeks, but the situation didn’t change. I’m actually wearing Jung Garam as a shell.

“What am I supposed to do…”

While muttering helplessly at the mirror, I suddenly remembered the message I had heard while entering this [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. Something about increasing the difficulty…

‘…No way, is the increased difficulty at fault for why I’ve become Jung Garam?’

No matter how you look at it, that seems to be the cause of this transformation; so, just in case, I called for the [System Message].

“System Message!”

[System Messages cannot be checked right now.]

However, the system messages flatly prevented access to message history. Come to think of it, I couldn't use skills during Woo Ragi's memory–perhaps things were similarly locked here?

"Then, I won't be able to access the Status Window either?"

However, when I mumbled 'Status Window' to myself, a familiar translucent, gray window manifested before my eyes.

Name: Jung Garam – Lv 7731
Class: Special Hunter (Special Assassin)
Guild: Red Lotus (Grade S+)

HP – 22,341,333/22,341,333
MP – 71,000,000/71,000,000

Title:

Special Hunter – A title only given to the most extraordinary hunters amongst the numerous sea of normal Treasure Hunters who have single-handedly mapped more than 100 unexplored Dungeons or paths–unrivaled in their ability.
<The 'Special Hunter' title increases agility by 10%.>

Matara's assassin – A title granted to the assassin who single-handedly protected the tyrant Matara and assassinated 10,000 archers, 7,000 spearmen, 200 master-class knights, and 5 archmages.
<The 'Matara's assassin' title grants you priority on all assassination related contracts. Additionally, you can use the [Black Market]'s VIP ticket at any time.>

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Stat:

Strength +980,000
Magic +250,000
Stamina +416,000
Agility +937,000
Luck +937,000
Intelligence +550,000
Physical critical damage: 5,245%
Maximum Physical Damage: 2,474%
Minimum Physical Damage: 903%
Physical Crit Percent: 87%
Curse Resistance: 9.21%
Vs. Monster Armor Pierce: 67%
Vs. Monster Magic Resistance Pierce: 32%
Physical Skill Cooldown Time Reduction: 66.87%
Probability of causing status effect 'Poison' with skills: 14.23%

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Skill

–Explosion: You can use bombs to destroy the surrounding terrain or enemies.
–Dark Counter: A powerful counter that ignores the defenses of a

specified target.
–Dark Gambit: Coat your shade-touched energy with poison and use it to stop enemy movement.
–Darkest Descent: Over a period of time, movement speed increases significantly and skills will output their maximum damage.
–Mapping: Update dungeon information in real-time, and share the information with party members quickly.

Although, the contents were completely different.

“Jung Garam’s Status Window opened?”

It seems like my outer appearance wasn’t just Jung Garam–a status window containing all his stats had appeared as well.

That wasn’t the only surprising thing.

“…[Explosion].”

A black sphere embossed with a holographic counter was created; ticking, seconds were dropping from [00:30]. I thought if the situation continued, I would only shatter the bathroom, so I pressed [Cancel Skill] straight away; I wouldn’t be able to handle the situation afterwards…

“I can’t believe it…”

As the [Explosion] skill unfurled, I felt a huge flow of power–a scale that I had never felt–coming from myself; I was so overwhelmed. It was akin to how a man who had only ever ridden a tricycle might feel when he steps into a luxury accelerated sports car for the first time.

Ding Dong–

There was no time to be mesmerized; the sound of a doorbell ringing suddenly echoed throughout the living room. I still felt agitated, but, aware of the need to check on visitors, I stumbled back into the living room where the intercom was.

When I touched the intercom screen, there was…a girl in a dress, standing outside the door and looking this way.

[Jung Garam-kun. [1] Why are you late for the meeting–forcing me to come all the way here?]

As if she knew I was looking at her, the girl immediately started talking without any mannerly greeting. This chaotic development messed with my senses, but I managed to recall that the girl in the flashy dress was [Red Lotus]'s Bang Eunji.

Given that she's still alive and also mentioned a meeting, this [Vengeful Ghost Memory's] setting must probably be set before the [Tower of Command] incident. However, I still had insufficient information, and, judging from the fact she's personally come to find and interrogate me, some setback must have happened.

Looking at the big clock on the living room wall, it was pointing to 10 am. My best guess was that there must have been some important meeting this morning.

It was a bewildering situation, but I tried to think about how to answer in my own way… But, I had little idea of what to say, so a long time passed while I hesitated. However, as Bang Eunji tapped the floor with the tip of her boots in frustration, I felt nervous and said whatever came to mind. "T-That's… I overslept."

[……]

Bang Eunji paused and stared at the camera. Then, she tilted her head to the right, as if she doubted me. I wondered if I made a mistake and held my breath, but, after standing still, she suddenly stood upright.

[Jung Garam-kun, are you sick?]

She asked in a monotone voice.

This was such a meaningful question for me. It would have been nice if I could pass this with a simple greeting, but if she felt any sort of incongruity there was no way for me to explain. In addition, I was further at a loss because I had no idea how Jung Garam and Bang Eunji used to talk to each other.

However, Bang Eunji soon shattered the silence and continued to speak.

[I don’t know what kind of scheme you’ve brewed, nor am I interested, but… You realize you’ll have nothing to say when you’re cut from the guild for missing a pre-raid meeting? It’s natural for Jung Garam-kun to have a child’s body, but personal responsibility and maturity can be nurtured through effort…]

If the real Garam heard that, he would be frothing at the mouth and come at her for a fight. Even I was half-fed up with the words that spewed out, one after another; in the midst of all that, the idea that I’d be kicked from the guild pierced my ears.

“C-Cut from the guild…” Even though this was inside of a [Vengeful Ghost Memory], the words still made me uncomfortable. Bang Eunji replied firmly.

[What are you mumbling about? Instead of cursing at me, you may as well hurry, wear your combat uniform, and come out. I’ve definitely delivered this message; if you don’t arrive at the guild quarters by 11 o’clock, Beatrice is mine. Guild Master-nim gave me permission.]

After saying that, Bang Eunji disappeared from the intercom screen. Gripping my hair and pulling it out, I eventually looked at the clock one more time and hurried to the dressing room.

* * *

When I left Garam's house, it was already 10:30. However, when I searched for the address of the Red Lotus office building on the internet, I found that it was only a 10-minute walk. There was no fear of arriving late.

But, I was still worried about what kind of attitude I should adopt in front of the other guild members.

'Especially Seo Dawon…"

It was evident that Seo Dawon would appear in this [Vengeful Ghost Memory]–my mouth dried up with worry.

'How am I supposed to treat Seo Dawon during the Red Lotus heydays?'

He had quick perception–a little strangeness, and I could be interrogated or suffer something horrible. After our contact, Seo Dawon treated me fairly gently, but I often saw him act mercilessly to others…

'He even slapped Koo Hui-seo yesterday…'

If Seo Dawon were to hit me… Even imagining that kind of situation made me tear up. Of course, in the case of capture, my safety was an issue as well.

'I should be sparing with my words as much as possible…'

In the end, I resolved to keep my mouth shut. Anyway, it was obvious that, as a Necromancer in this time period, even if I were to explain my words wouldn't be taken seriously.

Become a Patron!

TL: We're meeting the Guild members! I'm so excited >.<

Also, thanks for commenting on the chapters guys~ I'm always happy to read the comments. If you are enjoying this novel, consider rating it on NU as well~ it really helps <3

Footnotes

1. The -kun suffix is originally Japanese, but it's used in Korea as slang as well, among friends.

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Chapter 187

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With that in mind, I went to the Red Lotus building indicated on my cell phone.

“This is the headquarters…?”

The streets looked like how the past Seoul looked with prosperous buildings lining the streets. And, among them, the Red Lotus building boasted an unrivaled height and decadent scale.

My eyes bulged wide at the surprisingly unexpected building size and the large throng of people coming and going through the entrance… Somehow, I felt like the passing people were glancing at me.

There were many people who stealthily avoided eye contact when I turned my gaze their way, but some, as if they had been waiting for this moment, strangely stared back fiercely. Unable to observe the exterior of the building more, I was chased inside.

Unexpectedly, inside the building, security guards were standing in front, creating what seemed to be a security checkpoint system at a subway ticket gate–a strict boundary.

“Good Morning!”

“H-Hello…”

At that sight, I hesitated; a security guard who was inspecting the incoming people saw me, came out, and greeted me loudly. I didn't know why he was greeting me, so I flinched. But then I soon realized this body belonged to Jung Garam and awkwardly bowed my head.

'I… Did I make a mistake?'

When I looked up, all the security guards gathered in the lobby stared at me with a sour look. I froze–this was similar to the strange gazes I felt outside the building. It was then.

"Huh? Jung Garam?"

Someone called out Jung Garam's name from behind.

Looking behind, a man wearing round glasses and a white doctor's gown stood–hands stored in the gown's pockets–staring at me.

'…Who's this?'

As he approached me, one step at a time, my anxiety grew higher. I felt like I had seen him somewhere, but his name didn't immediately come to mind.

However, without leaving me any time to prepare, approached to be at a friendly distance, grinning all the while. "What are you doing at this hour?" He talked to Jung Garam without any hesitation.

Of course, I had wanted to talk to others as little as possible, but I couldn't afford to be suspected. In this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] I had been given a role where I could find a hint to summon [Choi Kyung-sik], so I tried to utilize the given information best I could.

First of all, judging by the boy's young face and his conversational tone, we must be the same age. [1] So, I smiled awkwardly and answered without honorifics. "Because…they said there's a meeting."

"Hm? That was postponed today. You didn't get the message?"

‘What?’

Bang Eunji said that if I didn’t arrive at 11 today, then I’d be kicked from the guild, though?

Embarrassed, I called forth the Status Window; just as the glasses-wearing boy said, I saw a notification in the [Guild] channel–‘A notice has arrived from Seo Dawon.’

[**Seo Dawon**: The meeting today has been postponed to 2 pm]

The message had even arrived at 7 am. Then, Bang Eunji’s harsh words for me to come by 11 o’clock…

“Was I deceived…?”

“Hm?”

“Ah–No… Eunji-ssi said for me to come by 11 o’clock…So…” With a despondent heart I mumbled, but the smiling boy adopted a strange expression when he heard my words.

“Eunji-ssi?” he replied. An odd gaze permeated into the eyes behind those glasses. At first, I wondered if I should explain who she was–just in case he didn’t know her.

The boy soon clicked his tongue and spoke as if he found me pathetic. “Then, are you pretending to be strangers this time?”

“Huh…?”

“You guys are so immature.” He then shook his head and crossed arms with me. Surprised, I almost avoided him, but the boy dragged me forward, uncaring. We walked in the direction of the security checkpoint that was guarded by security personnel.

“W-Where are we going?”

“We have to go in, right?”

“But, at this time…”

“Since you came early, we might as well go ahead.”

“Mmm…”

“Isn’t it pretty noncommittal to go back home? It’s just perfect to have lunch in my lab.”

The boy seemed to be rushing, so I asked where we were headed; he simply grinned and pulled me forward weakly.

As we approached closer, the security guards opened something that looked like a turnstile with a tense expression. The door, which had been closed and marked with a red laser, turned green; the boy and I passed through it and stood in front of the elevator.

The boy calmly pressed the button for the leftmost elevator, marked ‘executive-use.’ The elevator, which was waiting on the first floor, opened its doors immediately.

Then, the boy took out the employee card hidden within the collar of his doctor’s gown, scanned the reader, and pressed for the 47th floor with the touch pad. I had no idea what his name was until he took out the employee card–I fell into panic.

[Choi Kyung-sik].

The protagonist of this [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

* * ********

Since I only briefly saw Choi Kyung-sik in the [Vengeful Ghost Memory], I hadn't remembered him immediately. However, though I felt a little embarrassed, it only took a few seconds for the elevator to rise and arrive on the 47th floor.

Before I had decided what to do, Choi Kyung-sik had habitually grabbed onto my arm and walked into the 47th floor corridor. Furthermore, there was no choice but to enter his destination, his laboratory, due to the tight security present in the building.

It was as if the whole floor was dedicated to Choi Kyung-sik alone– desolate without any passersby. The long corridor was divided by thick doors, separating it into sections; these doors were impossible to pass through without the other's employee card.

In addition, as we walked, the lines of CCTVs made me feel as if we were going into a treasure storage warehouse rather than Choi Kyung-sik's personal laboratory.

'There's no blind spot where I can avoid surveillance…'

Was this how the inside of guild buildings were like?

However, after passing the fourth door, a relatively normal-looking small door appeared. Of course, a security pad for swiping your employee card was next to the door, but, when this door opened, a cozy space that reminded me of a small library had appeared.

Choi Kyung-sik entered the laboratory, and, as if he was familiar with all this, sat at the office desk. I stuck my butt on the small stool in front of the desk. As soon as I did that, the door closed behind me automatically.

Without looking to see if I had sat down properly, Choi Kyung-sik pressed the phone button on top of his desk. As soon as the signal connected, he ordered food quite familiarly, as if he had done this plenty of times before. "Two bulgogi burger set menus, please. I'll send Puppy."

It seemed like he was ordering us a meal; Choi Kyung-sik clapped his hands as soon as the phone call finished. A magic circle was drawn beneath his feet; soon, wood-carved puppy-shaved golem gradually manifested above the magic circle.

As soon as the summoned golem appeared, it ran towards the door after turning its head like a clockwork robot. I thought it'd bump into the door, but, right before it hit, it warped outside, accompanied by a whooshing wind sound.

All that happened in an instant. When I stared at him blankly, Choi Kyung-sik blushed and scratched at his cheek. "Well, Eunji said that there's an anime that I definitely need to watch if I'm an alchemist… Afterwards, I renewed my skills once."

"Uh… Mm?" I blinked because I didn't know what the other was talking about. Choi Kyung-sik waved his hand, as if to say 'don't mind'. Afraid that the conversation would continue onto a topic I had no idea about, I simply followed along and nodded. An awkward silence started to settle between us.

"…Garam-ie, you seem a little vacant today?"

But, the silence didn't last long. Choi Kyung-sik raised his glasses and asked me an uncomfortable question. His question felt as if he had noticed a difference between the 'real Jung Garam' and 'me.'

However, instead of being worried about being discovered, I was more concerned with how to bring Choi Kyung-sik, in front of me, to the [Vengeful Ghost Contract] stage. Because of that, I missed the timing to answer, and Choi Kyung-sik waved his hand, leaning his torso comfortably against his chair. "Is it because you left the house while drowsy… Well, you were always weak in the mornings."

'Jung Garam is weak in the mornings?'

Judging by the time I had spent with the young Assassin, I couldn't relate to that statement. However, his condition may have changed after

becoming a ‘servant’; there was no reason for me to get to the root of this incongruity.

Rather, I just nodded because I thought it would be a good idea to pretend that I was groggy. Of course, I didn’t close my eyes–I still had to keep an eye on Choi Kyung-sik.

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TL: Choi Kyung-sik <3
You guys can probably guess what anime he’s talking about.

Also, HAPPY VALENTINES DAY <3
Here’s a bonus chapter to thank you guys for reading~ Also thanks Yi Jia, Sae, Ara, and T for the Kofis >.<

Footnotes

1. Age determines how one speaks to another in Korea

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[Woof Woof!]

Meanwhile, [Puppy] had arrived, holding onto Choi Kyung-sik's lunch in its mouth. Since it had run out in a hurry earlier, I couldn't properly see it. Observing it closer, the puppy-shaped golem had the typical pebble-cobbled appearance of low-rank golems.

However, its movements were more gentle and fluid than any other golem I had ever seen. I had heard that it cost a lot of money to make the golem's joints move properly… seeing how its tail shook fiercely from side to side, it seemed that he had invested substantially into this simple golem.

'Come to think of it…there's a lot of expensive things within this lab?'

After receiving the bag containing the hamburgers from the golem, [Puppy], it was time to clean the desk so we could sit facing each other for lunch. After moving some documents to the side, I could see reagents and potions, ones often used in alchemy, lined up at the end of the desk.

As I kept my gaze far away from him, I noticed a small golden scale–totally authentic no matter how one looked at it–at the end of the desk, close to Choi Kyung-sik. On top of that scale were a pile of jewels as big as fingernails.

Only then did I notice powders–alchemical ingredients?–stored in flasks next to the thick books behind Choi Kyung-sik's back; they were displayed

like hourglasses. There were even at least 10 flasks that looked like they contained powdered gold.

‘I heard that alchemists have a lot of money…’

The sight of these jewels and expensive ingredients scattered about seemed to be a common view for Choi Kyung-sik; he simply focused his gaze on the hamburger bag I was holding. I thought the Alchemist seemed rather easy-going and, on the other hand, used to such luxury.

I tried hard not to express my surprise and handed Choi Kyung-sik a hamburger. However, when he received it, his expression seemed a bit odd. It seemed as if he had seen something surprising.

“Wow, you see all sorts of things in life–to think that Garam-ie would hand me a burger before taking care of his own.” With that said, the Alchemist admired the hamburger in his hands.

‘Just how did Jung Garam live his life for such things to be said about him…’

I almost sighed, but I managed to cover that up with Jung Garam’s blunt voice. “I-If you dislike it, then give it back…”

“I already ate it though?” Choi Kyung-sik laughed as he took a giant bite of the hamburger. Then, all throughout lunch, he chatted about this and that topic. He mainly talked about the new Golems he was making; I didn’t really understand most of what he was talking about. But, since I needed information on the Alchemist anyway, I concentrated on listening as much as possible.

However, that concentration could only take me so far. Honestly, how could I understand Golem circuit switching devices or whatever he was talking about…

“Haaah…” On top of that, after polishing off my hamburger, a yawn inadvertently bubbled out from me.

However, Choi Kyung-sik didn’t seem to care very much and continued to speak. “So, I thought it was a complete innovation. If I could phase it in immediately, we could save more than 30 percent base mana, I said. But then, Guild Master nodded with a face just like yours, Garam-ie. Anyway, I’m just glad it was easy to persuade him. I thought he would ask for a month’s worth of payment…”

‘I guess Seo Dawon was bored…’ Chin resting on my palm, I observed the diligently chattering Choi Kyung-sik. I wondered if he was a denser person than I had imagined.

When Choi Kyung-sik started a conversation about topics he was interested in, it seemed like he was the type of person to say all that he wanted to say without paying heed to his surroundings. Like he cared little if the surrounding people were listening or not. Thanks to that(?), it felt like he didn’t notice that I wasn’t exactly Jung Garam despite my stutters…

I couldn’t be sure whether or not this situation was advantageous for me, but this wasn’t too bad. Honestly, if I had met a sharp person, such as another guild member like Seo Dawon before I had met Choi Kyung-sik, I didn’t think I would be able to calmly sit down and converse.

‘The issue is… even though we dined so close to each other, I don’t know how I should end this [Vengeful Ghost Memory].’

What on earth should I do? I fell deep into contemplation as I stared at the still prattling Choi Kyung-sik.

It was then.

Knock Knock–

Suddenly, someone knocked on the laboratory door. For me, whose eyes were drowsily half-closing, the knock made me jump.

“Hm? Who’s that?” Unlike my nervous self, Choi Kyungsik didn’t double check who was behind the door and flung it open. Dressed in a flowy dress, Bang Eunji stood modestly behind the door. “Ah, Eunji-yah.”

“I didn’t realize that dwarf would be here too,” Bang Eunji said calmly, staring and throwing barbs towards me.

I wondered if I should get angry or if I should ignore her, but I thought that Jung Garam would have immediately blown his top. “W-Who’s a dwarf!”

“I didn’t mention Jung Garam-kun though?”

“……”

“I’m really tired of your victim-mentality.”

Even though I wasn’t the real Jung Garam, I was still somehow a little furious.

But, before I could retort, Choi Kyung-sik quickly stepped in between me and Bang Eunji and blocked our views. Then, as if he were changing the topic, he asked Bang Eunji, “Are you here because of the meeting?”

“Precisely. I’m convening our willful guild members for our hard-working, suffering guild master.”

“Alright, alright. We won’t arrive late.”

“It would please me if you’d come up to the meeting room right now.”

“Shall we go, Garam-ah?”

Of course, if possible, I didn’t want to go to a gathering with all the guild members… I knew I had no other choice, though, so I nodded and stood up from my seat.

When both of us stood up, Bang Eunji–perhaps to find more of those ‘willful guild members’–vanished into the hallway. In just 1 second, I could hear her footsteps near the elevator entrance; I was a little scared. To think that just a while ago I had thoughtlessly and fearlessly gotten angry at the owner of that tremendous speed.

‘I need to behave like the real Jung Garam, but… What happens if that leads me into a fight?’

I assumed that if I died as Jung Garam, the summoning would fail. After all, penalties have been applied.

‘I sorely need to sign this contract safely…’ I looked up at Choi Kyung-sik next to me, muttering inwardly.

* * *

Choi Kyung-sik and I rode the elevator to the very top floor–the conference room. I let the Alchemist proceed me, letting him walk consistently half a step ahead.

However, the top floor didn’t have as tight security as the others. I saw several conference rooms separated by opaque glass walls. It felt exactly like a small enterprise’s office room? In each conference room, people were discussing or presenting using a beam projector or whiteboard, really adding to that corporate atmosphere.

And, amongst all the many conference rooms, I assumed the spacious room at the end was where we would have our meeting. Choi Kyung-sik abruptly opened the door without knocking; I followed him docilely inside.

“Hello,” The Alchemist said.

“Good…afternoon.”

After the Alchemist’s cheerful greeting, I tried to add what was hopefully a normal greeting of my own before entering… The conference room contained more people than I had expected; cold sweat ran down my back.

Seo Dawon sat at the head of the table, looking over some documents (he did not look our way); Kim Olim and Woo Ragi sat beside him.

Kim Olim stood upright with a straight back, without even using her hands to aid in her posture; on the other hand, it was impressive to see how Woo Ragi leaned back on his chair–far enough that I worried the chair would break–with both feet on the table.

Next to Kim Olim sat a man with tattoos on both arms; he laid down on the table, face cushioned by his arms, as if he wasn't a part of this meeting. That man was probably Jo Chanyoung.

However… After observing Jo Chanyoung and looking at the man sitting across him…I saw an unexpected sight.

He was the only one who gave a soft smile to Choi Kyung-sik's greeting. From the moment I saw his face, I froze as if I'd been nailed to the floor.

It was Bae Jaemin.

"I've brought them all right on time, Guild Master-nim!"

If Bang Eunji hadn't banged open the door, entering and shouting like that, I may have stood there, useless, for all eternity.

After barely recovering my senses, I sat next to Choi Kyung-sik and bowed my head. I knew I would see the other Red Lotus members while they were alive–why didn't I think to include Bae Jaemin

A chilly voice, ringing throughout the conference room, cut through my belatedly embarrassed thoughts. "Thanks, Eunji-yah. Then… we'll start the raid meeting for [Second Company]."

Startled, I raised my head at the familiar voice. Seo Dawon, who had taken his eyes off the document he was holding, was looking my way.

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TL: Back to our regularly scheduled update~

Honestly, if I were an Alchemist, I would definitely create adorable golems.

Also, I made a slight mistranslation >.< Woo Ragi's weapon of choice is a "Echo Blade" not a "Chainsword." I'm going to slowly fix this in the previous chaps, but if you guys want to let me know where I'm missing stuff, feel free to tell me here or in Discord <3 (There's a channel in there for telling me about typos haha)

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As his gaze flickered by me, I inadvertently lost my breath and automatically straightened my back.

However, not many guild members responded to Seo Dawon's words. Some of the members with poor attitudes didn't even seem to be listening– for example, the one who still had his legs balanced on the desk or the one who was still slumped over onto the desk. That one didn't even bother raising his head. The atmosphere was chaotic throughout.

Bam–!

I have no idea when Bang Eunji took her [Gun Blade] out, but I didn't notice it until she slammed it onto the conference room's desk. It was then that Jo Changyoung–whose face I hadn't seen before–temperamentally raised his head.

Perhaps it was because he was disturbed from sleep, Jo Chanyoung was the most ferocious person I had ever seen. Slitted eyes without double eyelids, well-tanned copper skin–the sight of him was enough to intimidate me.

"Haa… I returned back home at 5 in the morning." His fatigued voice, protesting against Bang Eunji, was so hair-raisingly low; if it were me, I'd immediately apologize to him and avoid his gaze…

Bang Eunji, though, accepted Jo Chanyoung bloodthirst without changing her monotone expression. "Such whining won't work in a

professional society.”

Anyone could see that Bang Eunji looked far younger; the contrast between the two was so vast. But, instead of arguing, Jo Chanyoung muttered something vulgar and straightened his slumped back. Unexpectedly, he seemed to be the type to resign fast.

“The boss monster this time is a [Dragon]. It should be noted that, unlike the dragons we’ve dealt with before, there’s over 90% probability that this one has wings. If it’s as described in the scenario, its magic resistance must be quite high.” Seo Dawon ignored them both and continued the meeting placidly.

Kim Olim, as if she were assisting him, looked at the material in front of her and said, “Every scenario involving [Second Company]’s boss monster refers to it as ‘XXXXX’ instead of its specific name. Perhaps the [Dragon Slayer] title could originate from here.”

Listening to Seo Dawon and Kim Olim, Woo Ragi yawned as if he were bored, blinked a few times, and scratched his cheek. “We can just beat it– what’s the point of this meeting…”

For the main DPS, he spoke so unbelievably ignorantly. Seo Dawon glanced at Woo Ragi for a brief moment before neatly ignoring him. “However, we don’t know how many instant-death attack patterns this monster has. In the last scenario, the boss showed a total of three patterns, so it was quite easy to avoid… This time, I’ll explain while showing you a simulation.”

After speaking, Seo Dawon pressed the button on the remote control he was holding. Soon, the conference room’s lights went out; a large silkscreen lowered down behind him.

From then on, the [Second Company] strategy meeting continued for 3 hours without a break.

* * *

To be honest, I didn’t really listen to the meeting. Though this body belonged to Jung Garam, with my knowledge it was hard to understand– how should I know what a skill layup is?

However, unlike how I would just randomly beat up whatever monster would appear in the dungeon, it was impressive that they meticulously decided who would use what skill first when a monster appeared.

Furthermore, there was a simulation that informed us of the estimated time taken for the boss attack when we inputted various skill values in the program. Unlike us, Seo Dawon had his back to the screen, but it seemed like he had memorized all the skill sequences and attack values and didn’t need to look behind him.

Even more shocking was the use of the penalty that would take place after one used every skill–the time where one couldn’t use another skill after using all skills once. In other words: ‘cooldown time.’ Seo Dawon led the meeting by not only memorizing his own skills but the skills of the other guild members and the cooldown times as well.

“Then, I’ll go in first with [Subaquatic Bomb]…”

“That’s not a bad idea, but [Subaquatic Bomb] has a 15-minute cooldown and also needs to be used for the 2nd wave. So, fall behind; it’s better to let Olim-ie go here.”

“I think the timing is a bit tight. Even if I push through with [Dash], the maximum speed I can achieve is…”

The other guild members calmly took this in, as if it was commonplace for Seo Dawon to have studied this much. To take it further, the guild members seemed to be actively promoting their skills, providing Seo Dawon with more cards in his deck of skills to use.

For example, if a boss monster began to fly, Seo Dawon would use the skill [Gravity] to crush its flight; it took 30 seconds for the skill to be cast. In other words, the guild members needed to fill that 30 second time gap where Seo Dawon would cast his own skill with skills of their own.

The most stable pattern was the one in which Woo Ragi would come to the front and Kim Olim followed with an attack of her own. This method wasn't so bad if Kim Olim was dealing with a few monsters. However, if surrounded by 3 or 4 monsters, Woo Ragi might be attacked as well. The assist timing might not be accurate.

In such a case, Jo Chanyoung would come forward, saying he'd assist in retrieval efforts for the other guildmates or Bae Jaemin would say he'd position himself so that he could assist by casting strength buffs. Like this, the skill path was devised, accounting for failures and other member inputs. Around 20 failsafes for each situation were created.

What was also impressive was that all the other guild members clearly knew their own limits; if they expressed that they couldn't do something, Seo Dawon embraced.

I sat there, silently observing their conversation while drenched in a strange sense of defeat until the lights in the conference room were turned back on.

I couldn't open my mouth, not for fear of courting the others' suspicions, but because I was hit with the reality that the way that I, Choi Lee-kyung, had fought so far was really too abysmal. Should I say I felt a gap that couldn't be crossed with just hard work?

'And… What on earth is Jung Garam's level…'

Also, I was forced to speak a few times during the meeting because Seo Dawon looked at me during the middle. When two or more questions were flung my way, I felt like I was being tested; I kept Jung Garam's status window in the corner of my view while answering.

So naturally, I was led to observe Jung Garam's status window in more detail than before… I had almost released a deep sigh in the middle of the meeting, but I managed to keep my mouth shut. I knew that there would be a bit of a gap between me and the others, but… I didn't know that the gap would be so large that I couldn't even dare overcome it.

"Then, let's proceed this way first. I'll instruct you all in case of unexpected situations." Seo Dawon said.

"Fine."

"Understood, Guildmaster-nim."

"Yes, yes."

"Thanks for your hard work." [1]

Even while I was shocked in many ways, the meeting ended smoothly; the gathered guild members stood up from their seats.

"Thanks for all your hard work…" So, I stumbled to my feet and, like the other guild members, gave my parting greetings. I moved to follow Choi Kyung-sik, but…

"Ah. Garam-ie should stay behind for a moment." Seo Dawon chillingly said as he lowered the blinds.

'…W-What is it? Did I do something wrong? Does he suspect something?'

His words definitely made me uneasy. Seo Dawon's expression was genial, but that alone could not soothe my tension.

I wanted to ask why he asked me to stay behind, but my mouth wouldn't open. Instead, I held my hands together–as if in prayer–under the desk.

Strangely, though I was the only one told to stay behind, Bae Jaemin, who had been strangely absent throughout the meeting, did not leave the

conference room and sullenly remained in his seat.

“What’s wrong?” Seo Dawon asked Bae Jaemin. Bae Jaemin hesitated a little and glanced at me; it was as if whatever he wanted to say was difficult to express in front of me. Seo Dawon also noticed that gaze, and seemed contemplative as he looked alternatively between me and the Priest.

“I won’t take up much of your time.” Bae Jaemin said, gaining the initiative and locking eyes with the Mage.

Seo Dawon stared at him before turning towards me. “Wait outside the door for a minute.”

“Yes, yes…” Tasting liberation, I quickly got up from my seat. As I passed Bae Jaemin and was about to exit the conference room, I heard Seo Dawon’s cold voice–piercing, like a spear to the back of my head.

“You must have something important to say, Jaemin-ah.”

“……”

If I were Bae Jaemin, I would have paled at that threatening tone.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Hi~ I’m on vacation so I wasn’t able to edit as much >.< (Thanks so much to the PRs who catch most of my dumb errors~) Patreon’s advance chapter will come out later tonight >.<

Also big same, Lee-kyung, big same. Seo Dawon sounds so preemptively angry at Bae Jaemin.

Footnotes

1. Honestly, I had a hard time thinking of how to translate this. In the end, I took Papago's suggestion. However, this is less grateful than the translation makes it out to be. Honestly, ' ' does mean 'good job' or 'thanks for all your hard work' but it's something people say reflexively.

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Afterwards, I had no idea what the two talked about. As the heavy door of the conference room closed, the voices from inside had been cut off, as if a mute button had been pressed.

However, Bae Jaemin opened the conference room door sooner than I thought and exited. Though I stood right in front of the door, the Priest strode towards the end of the hallway without giving me a single glance.

‘It seems like he’s angry…?’

The moment Bae Jaemin had exited the door, I had briefly caught a look at his face; though it was a very brief moment, I clearly caught his crumpled brows. Since I had been wary of him from the very beginning–my attention had been occupied by the Priest–there was little chance I mistook what I saw. It sounded like he had an argument with Seo Dawon inside the room, and the argument didn’t seem to have a good resolution.

‘Is it okay for me to go in…?’

I was concerned about Bae Jaemin, but Seo Dawon was currently my biggest challenge.

The room seemed to be plunged in a chilly atmosphere; I couldn’t move and simply craned my neck to look inside. At that moment, as if he had been waiting for me, I heard a soft voice. “Come on in.”

"……" Faced with no other choice, I opened the conference room door and cautiously entered.

Inside, Seo Dawon looked at me with a smile. "You did something wrong, huh?"

"Yeah….Yes?"

"Why are you so conscious of me today?"

At first, I thought Seo Dawon was interrogating me in his own particular way, but… after speaking, he made a startlingly mischievous face.

It was as if… No, to be accurate, it was as if he had a soft spot for the owner of this body, Jung Garam. His eyes were friendly and relaxed–a look I had not expected from the Mage; I was startled at its unfamiliarity.

Moreover, Seo Dawon did not seem to find my embarrassment strange. He just looked at my red face and beckoned me to come closer. "Reach out your arm."

"Why…"

Seo Dawon didn't answer and instead smiled. I couldn't refuse that smile.

Hesitating, I offered my right arm; Seo Dawon briefly grabbed my wrist before releasing it. When the Mage's hands fell away, the [system message alert] rang, notifying that I had acquired a new item. Surprised, I stared down at my wrist.

On it, there was…

[Glow-in-the-dark Bracelet

Type: Bracelet
Durability: 10

Equipment restriction level: 10

Special Skills: None.

Description:
The glow-in-the-dark color changes when you shake the bracelet.]

A strange bracelet.

Seo Dawon laughed out loud at my stunned expression. “You were expecting ‘Bea,’ huh?” [1]

“No…”

“Don’t lie. Your face turned completely red.” His tone was clearly teasing.

Of course, I was surprised. However, my surprise wasn’t caused by the paltry item on my wrist but rather the Mage’s attitude.

Until now, I thought that Seo Dawon and Jung Garam had a hierarchical relationship. Although Jung Garam always acted nonchalantly, the young Assassin had always minded the line between them. So, I had imagined that the two would have a more rigid relationship. That is to say…a relationship where Seo Dawon barks orders and Jung Garam listens? The other guild master-guild member relationships that I had witnessed were like that…

However, it seemed that during their lifetime, these two had a relationship where banter was easily exchanged. Even now, the perceptive Seo Dawon wasn’t suspicious of me… As expected, it must be because I was wearing Jung Garam’s face.

Rather than doubting me, Seo Dawon just judged that Jung Garam’s mood and condition were different from usual. Well, I suppose when a close friend behaves a little differently than usual, most people would assume an off mood rather than guessing that they’re a completely different person…

“Bea should be given at a formal occasion.”

“……”

“I’ll distribute it to you the day before we raid [Second Company].”

“…Yes.” After organizing my thoughts, I relaxed slightly.

Seo Dawon chuckled and immediately continued, “Lim Jisoo entered the country secretly.”

“……!”

“It’s important to find out who she met, but we lost contact with the spy we planted. And, I think… the information leaked from our side.”

After hearing that, I recalled Bae Jaemin who had just left the conference room just now. Was he in league with Lim Jisoo ever since the [Second Company] raid? The probability was high.

However, I wasn’t sure if, at this point, I could talk about Bae Jaemin to the Mage.

‘Anyway, this place is… inside the [Vengeful Ghost Memory]…’

No matter what was done here, the future wouldn’t change. However, Seo Dawon seemed to have gleaned something different from my darkened expression. “The information leak is just a guess. Still, just in case.”

“……”

“Tell me if something peculiar happens.”

“I…understand.” I nodded, my head weighty. Seo Dawon patted me on the shoulder. With my head bowed slightly and followed the other out of the conference room

* * *

Mired in my complicated thoughts, I walked around aimlessly; suddenly, I found myself in front of Jung Garam's lodgings.

Actually–since I was stuck in a time long before even the [Tower of Command] raid, before even the [Second Company] raid–I knew no other place and had no choice but to return to Garam's house.

However, the problem was… Upon entering the home, there were unexpectedly people casually watching TV inside the living room.

"What on…"

"Ah, Garam-ah."

"I believe I've said around 10 times that you have horrible interior design taste, Jung Garam-kun."

Sitting on someone else's sofa and munching on potato chips, Choi Kyungsik and Bang Eunji greeted me.

I had wondered how I should find Choi Kyungsik who had disappeared after leaving the guild building, but, now that I saw the two of them casually sitting in someone else's house, I felt strange. Did the original Garam-ie give the other guild members his home passcode?

In addition, even though she was watching TV and snacking in someone else's home, Bang Eunji didn't stop her criticisms.

I couldn't believe my eyes, I wanted to say something, but, no matter what I say, I felt like I'd just get more exhausted. Besides, how could I retort when I saw them eating the snacks deliciously and swinging their legs softly back and forth?

'How old is Bang Eunji anyway?'

I know that Jung Garam had been a User since he was a minor, but Bang Eunji looked unnervingly young.

I stared at the two, released a deep sigh, and walked over to the sofa and flopped on its seats. Choi Kyungsik sat on the living room floor, leaning his back against the sofa. As soon as I sat down, he immediately rested his head on my lap. He was natural–as if he had done this more than once or twice.

Bang Eunji tilted the cylinder container of potato chips towards me. I reached my hand inside–perhaps she was sharing–but there was nothing inside.

“I’d like one more; salty-caramel flavor, please.” She casually requested.

She frustrated me, but I stood up from the sofa, went to the kitchen, and retrieved the same snack from the alloted snack box. Feeling emotional, I threw the cylinder at her, but Bang Eunji simply caught the flying snack with her eyes fixed on the TV. Once again, she began eating diligently.

Even more frustrating was that Bang Eunji fed Choi Kyung-sik, who was still watching TV; the young girl simply placed a snack in his mouth. Of course, I, sitting next to the Alchemist, didn’t even get a piece…

‘Why on earth am I sad?’

So, I blatantly glared at Bang Eunji until she was caught off guard; I stole the container and popped one chip into my mouth.

Then, Bang Eunji softly turned her head from where she had been watching the screen to give me a cold stare… The potato chip inside my mouth was pretty tasteless, but her upset expression was the most delicious seasoning.

Then, as if taunting her, I picked up a handful of the chips and ate them. I felt a cool energy on the back of my neck and instinctively leaned my torso back.

Shhaaa–!

A red line ripped through the air where my head was and vanished; if I were in my own body, I would not have been able to avoid that. In a blink of an eye, Bang Eunji was once again holding the cylinder of chips.

Bang Eunji smiled brightly and returned my taunt, tilting the barrel as if to pour out all the remaining snacks into her mouth. With my left hand, I snactched them from the air before the potato chips disappeared into her mouth. All she ate were a few grams of potato chip seasoning.

“You’re quarreling again.”

I could hear Choi Kyung-sik sigh from where he was sitting on the living room floor, but I was too busy running away–so her [Gunblade] won’t slice my finger. My mind was too chaotic to listen.

Bang Eunji’s attacks grew more blunt as she got more agitated–her attack pattern had changed. She was now aiming at my neck instead of the sweets. I dodged every attack I could see, but, in my bid to escape her attacks, my hands inadvertently crushed the snacks held within.

However, it was so much fun, so we continued to fight childishly over the empty container of chips until Bang Eunji finally split the living room sofa in two.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Choi Kyung-sik, Bang Eunji, and Jung Garam are kinda adorable together–the babies!

Also, here’s the poll for the 200th! I’ll let it run for a couple of chapters.

https://take.quiz-maker.com/poll4182866x98364057-131?s=res

Feel free to comment why you chose who you chose. And, if you chose ‘other,’ feel free to comment who that person is!

Footnotes

1. Bea, ofc, is short for Beatrice’s Prayer

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Bang Eunji's personality was exactly like a cat's. Just like a cat play-hunting, she would rush to bite at a hand just waving in her field of view.

I returned to my senses and stopped playing around when her [Gun Blade] dug halfway into the sofa's back.

When I beckoned for us to stop, Bang Eunji's persistent attack stopped as well, but her eyes belied her desire to stab me once more. Rather than hating me, it seemed that her personality would not allow her to not return any hits and wrongdoings.

Fortunately, Jung Garam had formidable physical ability, so I was able to narrowly–by a hair's margin–avoid her hands. In return, Bang Eunji's eyes became slitted, showcasing her rising annoyance.

Choi Kyung-sik, watching us, yawned and asked, "Haaah…Must you guys only play by yourself?"

"Bang Eunji won't stop." I said, as if reporting my troubles, but Choi Kyung-sik didn't seem to be very interested in my hardships. Seeing a gap, Bang Eunji once again lept towards me; in order to stop these shenanigans, I deliberately didn't dodge.

However, instead of stabbing me with her blade, she actually bit my hand with her teeth–like a cat. Thanks to Jung Garam's endurance, it didn't hurt. When I saw the girl, with hand in mouth, roll her eyes and cheeks reddened–clearly feeling victorious, my tension ebbed away.

‘She’s totally a kid…’

“I must say, your hands are totally chapped, Jung Garam-kun!”

“……”

Meanwhile, Bang Eunji, drunk with victory, spoke pompously; instead of responding, I flicked her on her forehead. Immediately, she punched me. It was worth getting hit though, I felt like my body was being drained of anxiety…

‘If it were the real Jung Garam, these two would really have fought the entire day…’

Garam-ie probably wouldn’t let his hand get bitten like I did. He probably would have fought his hardest…

It was only then I understood how Bang Eunji could enter and leave Garam’s house without hesitation. The two really matched well. They were similarly immature, and the relationship was well maintained because they were so similar.

However, Choi Kyung-sik was still hard to comprehend. Why was he squashed among these animal-instinct humans? He didn’t look like someone with much physical ability; he may be bloodied if Jung Garam were to mistakenly swing his hand…

Of course, that was considering Jung Garam’s impressive physical standards. Therefore, I became even more curious about how the two grew close. For some reason, I thought the keyword for this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] was contained within this contradiction as well…

“Where are…you…going today?” [1] I asked while looking down at the top of the Alchemist’s head. After all, I have to confront the unknown. These words were bolstered by the confidence I had gained after I wasn’t discovered by Seo Dawon earlier.

As expected, Choi Kyung-sik did not find my question awkward. He answered, while looking up at me, “Guildmaster-nim told me to level up until the [Second Company] raid. Haah…”

His sighing face somehow reminded me of my past self.

Recalling how I had to work diligently in the Dungeons to meet minimum summoning levels, I suddenly felt a familiarity with Choi Kyung-sik… Choi Kyung-sik, similar to me, must have been at a low level.

“How many level-ups do you need?”

“I’m in the late 4000s, so he told me to change that first digit.”

Familiarity canceled…

However, perhaps he gleaned something else from my sour expression, Choi Kyungsik cleared his throat, a little ashamed. “I worked hard to raise my manufacturing level! I just didn’t have time to enter dungeons because I’ve been so busy designing custom potions for all of you…”

“This time as well, Choi Kyung-sik-kun will be carried on our backs again.” Bang Eunji answered before I could respond to Choi Kyung-sik’s words. She coyly wiped saliva from her chin with a haughty expression.

“Whoo… Instead, Ta-da! Let’s use this once: It’s my specially manufactured combat potion.” Choi Kyungsik smiled and opened his inventory without getting angry at Bang Eunji’s retort.

Less than a second after Choi Kyung-sik signed with his fingers, two flasks with red fog–rising like dry ice mist–were placed between the Alchemist’s fingers. He handed one to me and Bang Eunji respectively.

[Combat Potion – RED 1.9 Ver

Type: Potion
Level Restriction: None (Qualification Limit: Must own a combat skill

grade S or higher)
Special Skill: The combat skill's operational capacity is improved one hour after drinking.

Produced by Choi Kyung-sik of 'Red Lotus.'

***Buff List**

Strength/Magic + 100%
Skill Damage +200%
Skill Cooldown time decrease +10%
Ignore Monster Defense -33%
Ignore Target Resistance -100%
Monster Control +3.4%
Boss Monster Control +5.8%]

"Wow…" When I read the potion's effect, my admiration poured out all on its own.

I couldn't believe just drinking this thing could give such large buffs… Couldn't this be comparable to a Priest or a Bard? Even non-Alchemist Users knew that the manufacturing difficulty of a combat potion rises sharply just by attaching one or two buffs during production.

'But, to have seven buffs…'

In addition, almost all the elements weren't useless add-ons and would increase combat power. a User could generate more than twice their usual power just by drinking this.

However, Choi Kyung-sik, who had been enjoying my admiration, suddenly grumbled, "Isn't it good? Amazing? But, our Guild master is so greedy…Do you know what he said to me?"

"What did he say….?"

“He told me to continue to improve it so that we could go inside the Dungeon without a Priest. He wanted to increase its duration by more than half a day and double the combat buff add-ons to 13 or 15. Honestly, if he wanted that I told him that I could make various different types of potions, but he scoffed, saying ‘Are you going to drink two liters of potions before a battle begins…?’” Choi Kyung-sik kept on griping, like a disgruntled engineer.

I was shocked by what he said.

‘…To be rid of the need for Priests with just one Potion?’

If Red lotus had survived after [Tower of Command]…Would it really have been possible to make such a potion?

Usually, it was difficult to develop potions recipes (its ingredients and ratios); once the recipe was completed, mass production was easy. Production was one of the aspects that truly felt game-like, ignoring laws of physics.

In reality, factories, manpower, and a large amount of time were needed to commercialize certain industrial products. However, alchemists would be able to input ingredients and press the [Production] button to print thousands or ten thousands at a time.

‘He’s already completed about 50% of that goal…’

If this potion had been finalized, Red Lotus would truly have developed into an unrivaled guild. Dungeoneering party formations could be radically changed.

At the moment, no matter what Dungeon, Priests or Bards were essential. They were worth more than other classes because of their buffs. However, if this [Combat Potion] were to debut… It would become an invention that could shake the basic tenets of User society.

‘The ranking for ‘noble’ classes could change…’ [2]

As precious and valuable classes, many buffers would abuse their power. They'd often tease, "Don't like? Should've been a Bard" or "Hate it? Should've been a Priest."

Even if other Users sarcastically remark, 'Are you some heavenly being?', reality hadn't changed. After all, Priests and Bards were irreplaceable in parties. All Users knew that.

As a result, this conflict between buffers and general Users began to deepen. For example, a low-level beginner Priest was twice as valuable as a skillful second-year Warrior.

One's life would become difficult if they piss off a Bard or Priest, so, even if those buffers were being bossy, ordinary Users had no choice but to shut up and endure. Even if they could no longer stay patient and wrote a smear article, they would do so with a sub-account and not their original ID.

Now, Users had gotten used to such discriminatory treatment; though they knew it was unfair, this injustice became established as a way of life…

'Then, if Choi Kyungsik is revived, won't Bae Jaemin be impacted indirectly?'

If Choi Kyung-sik were to be revived and finalize the [Battle Potion], just that would indirectly deal a large blow to Bae Jaemin's class. Furthermore, this [potion] may make its user stronger; even if the servants couldn't use this Potion, its quality would be enough for the General User's market.

At that moment, I remembered how Seo Dawon had earned me tens of billions of won in a short time in the past. I excitedly looked at the Alchemist.

Become a Patron!

TL: They’re all babies TT_TT
Also, Dawon, what are you doing with that potion…. O.O Getting rid of Priests??

And the survey is still open! It’ll be open for at least 2 more chaps. Currently Jung Garam is in the lead!

https://take.quiz-maker.com/poll4182866x98364057-131?s=res

Footnotes

1. Choi Lee-kyung is struggling to speak informally.
2. Noble, used here, is to denote which classes are considered royalty among the Users

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“Still, if you manage to develop it, won’t you become totally rich?” I asked.

“Well, I suppose it’ll have an impact, but mass production would be difficult because of the ingredients. I haven’t found any alternatives for the key ingredients yet.”

At my question, Choi Kyung-sik stopped griping and began to sincerely explain.

Looking at his excitement, he seemed like a professor who had been asked about his field. Though it seemed like he was grumbling, his eyes twinkled during his explanation–this was truly his calling. The unique passion of someone who loves his work flowed out through his eyes.

“For example, if we take one of the core components, hm…, Say we need a mineral called [Adamantium], we would need to gain mining rights for Mine Dungeons in order to source it in large quantities… Since there’s little of that sort here, we’ll have no choice but to contact overseas Users and their mines…”

“Ahh… Then, it’s definitely hard to make money straight away…”

“That’s not all. If you want to make lots of money, this needs to be sold to as many Users as possible. However, this potion has a fixed condition.”

“What? Everyone will want to take this potion as soon as it comes out.”

“The qualification restriction on its use is absurdly high.”

While listening to Choi Kyung-sik’s explanation, I took another glance at the potion in my hands. Now that I look at it, there was no level limit, but next to that line, the qualification restriction stood out.

I inadvertently read it outloud, “Only those with S-grade or higher combat skills can use this…?”

“That’s right… Even I can’t drink that potion.”

“Really?” Startled by his unexpected remark, I stared at Choi Kyung-sik.

Perhaps he misunderstood my gaze, he sullenly responded, “Jeez. [1] Not all Users have S-class combat skills like you, you know?”

Though his tone didn’t sound jealous, I felt awkward since it seemed as if I were boasting. I didn’t mean to make a personal attack…

However, on second thought, this body–Jung Garam’s body–courts such misunderstandings because he was so high spec. If it were my original stats, my question would just seem ignorant. From a level 7,000 person, the meaning may be twisted into something chastising like ‘you can’t even drink that potion?’ So, though it may feel unfair, I apologized.

“Then, is there anyone else in Red Lotus that can’t drink that?” I asked.

“Garam-ie, I hate you…”

“Don’t bother Kyungsik-ie, Jung Garam-kun.”

Unfortunately, even that question was another miss. Perhaps he was really upset this time, Choi Kyung-sik pushed at my knee with both hands and turned his head away. Bang Eunji even scolded me–happily, as if she had gained some advantage…

Of course, I was flustered; that wasn’t what I meant. But, now I understood that the [Combat Potion] limitation was quite high from the response I had received. If even Choi Kyung-sik, who was over level 4,000,

couldn’t benefit from its effect, a considerable number of Users would not be able to drink that even if they were given the potion.

‘Still, except for Choi Kyung-sik, that means that all the Red Lotus guild members can drink it, huh? That’s amazing… That means that everyone’s at least level 5,000.’

Of course, there was a traitor named Bae Jaemin among them. Still, I was struck by the member’s statuses. They’re so successful…

‘What’s Seo Dawon’s level?’

As my thoughts continued, my gaze naturally wandered to the [Glow-in-the-Dark Bracelet] on my wrist.

“That’s why Guild Master-nim ordered me to develop the potion in two ways.”

“…..Huh?”

Speak of the devil–as soon as my thoughts turned to the Mage, Choi Kyung-sik spoke of him.

Flustered by the timing, I almost made a strange sound. Choi Kyung-sik definitely wasn’t a sensitive person; he didn’t notice my awkward reaction. He continued smoothly, “One way is to dilute this [Combat Potion] for general User use by diluting it by a hundredth or thousandth in order to lower qualification restrictions and efficiency. Also, to make it really cheap. Perhaps I could describe it as low-end? In this case, mass production would definitely be possible.”

“Ahh…”

“The other method would be to develop an improved [Combat Potion] for total Ranker use. That’s why, as a User’s level increases, they can gradually increase their access to different grades of this potion. If they use this potion as a beginner, wouldn’t they continue to use it as their level rises? After all, Users don’t often change the consumables that they use. If

we expose our products to those in low levels, we'll completely take over this market."

"W-Wow…"

"Really, our guild master… Isn't he good at wracking his brains for ways to make money?"

I wondered if I should respond, but for some reason I felt shy and clamped my mouth shut. However, I vigorously nodded my head several times.

"He's handsome too." Bang Eunji confidently said what I had only inwardly thought. Choi Kyungsik looked exhausted at those words and shook his head, but he didn't retort since it was an open secret that Bang Eunji blindly followed the Mage.

* * *

After conversing for a while, it suddenly became evening; the two ate dinner in this house and, bewilderingly, still did not leave. Well, now that I've gotten used to Jung Garam's body, it wasn't too hard to deal with them…

'Is this perhaps not Garam-ie's house…Is this the Red Lotus dorms or something?'

Both of them seemed to be vacantly staring at their cell phones or watching TV–comfortably, as if this is their home–with no sign of leaving.

"Hey… Are you perhaps sleeping here tonight?" I asked cautiously.

Bang Eunji looked up from her cell phone screen and stared at me, "Of course. I guarded him during the day."

“Huh…?”

“So, isn’t it fair for Garam-kun to do it during the night?” She sounded accusatory, as if she were criticizing a slacking coworker. Choi Kyung-sik, who played mediator every time we growled at each other, shrugged his shoulders when our eyes met.

His gesture informed me he had no intention of intervening. Of course, I couldn’t understand Bang Eunji’s words, so cold sweat flowed down my back.

‘Somehow, this feels like some important key event…’ [2]

It feels like I have to calmly pass this test. So, I nodded and tried to adopt an expression that exclaimed, ‘I already knew~.’ Of course, inwardly I felt like I was going to get motion sickness from trying to deduce what was happening.

‘…Let’s think this through coolly. What did Bang Eunji say? Guard? She said guard, right…? Since Bang Eunji said that it’s only fair if I guard during the night if she did so during the day, I have to protect something right? … But, who am I supposed to guard?’

Just as I thought that, my eyes turned to Choi Kyung-sik, sitting on the sofa and watching TV. Choi Kyung-sik locked gazes with me and scratched his cheek. “You still haven’t caught the lab terrorist, right?”

“Huh?”

“I guess you don’t have much to say” Perhaps he took my exclamation as answer, Choi Kyung-sik’s shoulder drooped in disappointment.

Bang Eunji, who saw that, responded on my behalf. “The terrorist has been caught, and we’re trying to figure out who’s behind him.”

“Really? Garam-ie is going to personally interrogate them?”

Bang Eunji opened her mouth, so I thought I could take a breather, but the question was flung back at me like a boomerang. Thanks to this, I was too busy guessing at the current situation; my mind felt chaotic. I felt strangled at the sight of two pairs of eyes staring at me.

'…Laboratory terrorist? The laboratory they're mentioning…it must be that strange place on the 47th floor, right? I had thought it was structured a bit differently from the meeting room… Ah! Did the security system change due to the terrorist attack?'

A plausible scenario was being written inside my whirling head. I opened my mouth and gambled, "He's an… insane guy, right? He's enough of a nutjob to blow up a whole floor…"

I tried my luck–this gamble was enough to drain the blood from my face.

Fortunately, it seemed like my reasoning was correct; Choi Kyung-sik nodded. "Well, I suppose he wouldn't open his mouth easily."

"However, he's still alive, right? Jung Garam-kun would often torture and not interrogate; many times now he's made people into dishrags."

"……"

The problem was… Perhaps interrogating the captured criminal was mainly entrusted to Jung Garam…the questions wouldn't stop coming.

I tried to enter the real 'Jung Garam's' mentality, trying to assuage whether or not the terrorist was still alive. I thought of Jung Garam's attitude, back when he tore Park Hoseok into pieces…

"His tongue is…intact." Wouldn't this answer be appropriate? Fortunately, that must have been enough, neither of them asked me any more questions. And I… became sure of something.

'This Vengeful Ghost Memory…'

There must be special conditions to complete this memory. And in order to succeed in those conditions, I was given Jung Garam's body as a tool.

Maybe that goal is…

‘Maybe it’s saving Choi Kyung-sik from the threat of assassination.’

TL: Hey guys, really quick update before I gotta go. I’ve been a bit busy, writing my thesis paper.

I’ll leave the poll up until chapter 193!

https://take.quiz-maker.com/poll4182866x98364057-131?s=res

Footnotes

1. (cham, nah) Is a sound of frustration, annoyance, etc. It’s just an exclamatory remark. I used Jeez here to fit Kyung-sik’s personality and his tone.
2. It’s ‘important timing’ in the original.

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Only then did the sequence of events begin to make sense.

Seo Dawon had even mentioned Lim Jisoo's stealth entry into the country with me in a private meeting and had said that information was being leaked from our side. He wasn't just being conversational; there was a high chance his words were related to the laboratory attack incident.

'I 100% think Bae Jaemin is the culprit…'

The problem was that I had insufficient evidence to support this claim. Just in case, I turned to Bang Eunji and spoke, "Was there… anyone suspicious you saw just before the attack?"

"I only saw the guild members though?"

"Mmm…"

"Are you perhaps saying that there's an information leak from the inside?" Bang Eunji reacted quickly to my question. Choi Kyungsik turned his head–from vacantly staring at the TV–to look at me as well.

I fell silent; I wasn't sure how much I could reveal.

Thankfully, before the atmosphere could become awkward, Bang Eunji broke the ice. "Well, if one thinks like that, then wouldn't everyone be suspicious? Honestly, other than Seo Dawon-nim, everyone is flawed…"

“By ‘inside,’ do you mean the guild members? No way… They have no motive.” Choi Kyung-sik and Bang Eunji’s opinions were split.

Choi Kyung-sik felt uncomfortable even imagining the possible betrayal of a guild member; Bang Eunji blatantly stared at me before turning away. It was as if she were implying ‘You’re the most suspicious one.’

“The attack would be impossible without access to internal information.” I decided to provoke the two a little.

Choi Kyungsik widened his eyes and shrunk into himself when I said I was sure of the mole’s existence. Bang Eunji maintained her calm expression, but I was sure she wasn’t carelessly listening.

Unlike before, a heavy atmosphere settled between the three of us. Bang Eunji broke the long silence, “But, Kyung-sik-ie is also correct. Is there any reason for an insider to betray us?”

“…That’s the thing about human greed–It doesn’t disappear because someone has plenty now.”

“Whether it’s money or honor…To be honest, there aren’t many places that would treat us better than Red Lotus. There’s no merit to betrayal.”

Choi Kyung-sik and Bang Eunji were ignorant of Bae Jaemin’s nature so they could say such things, but I felt frustrated in my efforts to instill awareness within them.

Therefore, I wondered if I should press my luck and mention my suspicions of Bae Jaemin, but Bang Eunji suddenly crossed her arms over her chest and glared at me. “You’re not going to say that Bae Jaemin is the culprit here, are you?”

“What? You’re also suspicious of Bae Jaemin?”

“……”

“……”

Startled, I stared at her, but Bang Eunji looked incredibly disillusioned. Her expression seemed to convey, ‘What did I expect from this person.’ Even Choi Kyungsik sighed deeply.

Flustered by their attitudes, I stammered and responded, “W…What?”

“Haah, Garam-ah…”

“Jung Garam-kun. No matter how much you may dislike Bae Jaemin, this isn’t it. I think that even the most placid of people like him would snap at all your accusations and really commit a crime.”

Looking at their reactions, their trust in the Priest seemed stronger than I had imagined.

Furthermore… It seems as if I’ve lost all pretenses of objectivity since the original Jung Garam hated Bae Jaemin intensely. Only then did I realize my mistake and tried to cover for myself.

Choi Kyung-sik took the initiative to soothe me with his soft voice. “If Jaemin-ie wanted to kill me, he wouldn’t have to hire an assassin. Just yesterday, the two of us ate together and drank coffee.”

“…I’m sure he didn’t want to be exposed as a criminal…”

“What I’m saying is… you know Jaemin-ie is a Priest right?”

“I know…”

“It’s so easy to fabricate causes of death or cast a death-pursuit timer on someone with Priest skills. Between the effort of finding an Assassin that’s difficult to identify and gamble on a lower chance of success, and simply manipulating and killing my target with my own skills, I don’t think I’d choose the former.”

Of course, my ill-formed thoughts without evidence wouldn’t work on a person who speaks so firmly and conclusively. Therefore, I stepped down first, blaming myself for being so hasty with my words. “…Fine.”

“Are you upset, Jung Garam-kun?”

“Garam-ah…”

Instead of trying to keep a straight face, I turned my backs on them, crossed the living room floor, and entered my bedroom.

I felt sorrowful more than upset. In particular, I knew what Bae Jaemin had done to Jung Garam–how the young Assassin died, so their reactions felt cruel. Choi Kyung-sik and Bang Eunji did nothing wrong, though. Furthermore, their reactions were a history long past–I’m inside a [Vengeful Ghost Memory], after all…

“Haah…”

Eventually, after laying face down on the bed for a while, I got up to brush my teeth and prepared for sleep.

No matter what may happen tomorrow, I won’t neglect to monitor Bae Jaemin. When I was in Choi Lee-kyung’s body, I was worried about personal safety since I could die in one blow, but now that I’m borrowing Jung Garam’s body…

“I’ll catch you this time…”

Above all, I won’t be able to sleep in peace if I weren’t able to deal the Priest a blow in at least the [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

Since I’ve become Jung Garam, shouldn’t I, as his master, reward him with this small revenge? Even though this plaintive wish may be pathetic, I automatically clenched my fists.

* * *

When I woke up, I felt so much better; I was able to even ignore Bang Eunji's smarmy comments. In addition, the young girl followed Choi Kyung-sik around to guard him during the day, so I could move around freely. I immediately headed straight to the Red Lotus headquarters.

"Good Morning!"

"…Yeah." I murmured.

The security personnel were as deafening as the day before. I even packed my employee ID card that I had forgotten yesterday and safely received my entry stamp.

I came here today to meet with Seo Dawon, the guild master.

Yesterday, Seo Dawon was…That is to say, the way he was so tender and kind with 'Jung Garam' and so cold-hearted towards Bae Jaemin gave me courage. I pressed and scratched the [Glow-in-the-Dark Bracelet] Seo Dawon gave me with my fingertips

"What on earth… Jung Garam?"

"Garam-ie? What are you doing here at this time?"

"Ngh… H-Hello…" I stammered.

When the elevator doors I had been waiting for opened, Woo Ragi and Kim Olim departed. The two gave me a puzzled stare; at their gaze, I nervously said, "So…I'm here to see…Seo Daw–, No, Guild master… hyung."

"Now?"

"He's probably busy."

"Uh… Is he super busy?" Because I wanted to talk to the Mage about Bae Jaemin as soon as possible, I didn't catch the furtive glance the two shared.

However, Woo Ragi replied in an indifferent tone, “If it’s urgent, go.”

“Ah, okay.”

“Make sure to knock.” Kim Olim also didn’t bother to stop me, so I quickly took the elevator and pressed the button for the top floor.

After riding twice, the high-speed elevator was now familiar to me; I rode up to the top floor in just a few seconds and began walking towards Seo Dawon’s office. Because the office was next to the conference room that we had a meeting room in yesterday, it wasn’t too difficult to find it. I stood in front of the door and knocked…

Knock Knock–

For some reason, there was no response from within. Just in case I wasn’t heard, I was about to knock on the door again.

“…Enter.”

Though slow, that was definitely Seo Dawon’s voice. Feeling tense, I opened the door after taking a deep breath.

When the door opened, Seo Dawon and an unfamiliar woman were standing close together. It was as if his answer was delayed because the woman was in his arms just before my knock…

The woman, still standing close to the Mage, smiled brightly, “Ah, it’s Garam-ie. Long time no see.”

“What happened?” Seo Dawon asked.

“……”

Her smile contrasted starkly against Seo Dawon’s slightly expressionless face; nevertheless, the two made a dazzling pair. Looking between the two, I froze like a fool, unable to say anything.

She was truly beautiful. I had seen a picture of her in the past, but… She was so much more gorgeous in person. Her eyes had an elegant and profound shape; the refreshing way she smiled. The caliber of her beauty was comparable to Seo Dawon.

The way they matched…The rumors of possible engagement or marriage…

“Ryu Hyerin…”

“Hm?”

I carelessly muttered her name; she made eye contact with me. Ryu Hyerin looked at me as if she wondered why I called out her name and soon approached me. Then…

“Aren’t you glad to see me?” She said as she lightly dragged me into her arms, hugging briefly before releasing me. A fresh, green floral scent wafted past my nose before dissipating.

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my gosh, my heart dropped for Lee-kyung when I realized Ryu Hyerin was in the room.

Also, the poll is now officially closed! With 92 votes out of a total of around 300, Jung Garam has won! Second place was Lee-kyung and 3rd was Seo Dawon!

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Chapter 194

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Of course, I might run into Ryu Hyerin in this time period. After all, the ‘Red Lotus’ was intact, and she was Seo Dawon’s fiance.

However, I was shocked by a different aspect than when Bae Jaemin had appeared. In particular, I hadn’t expected to see the Mage and her standing together. So, I hurriedly bowed my head. I didn’t want anyone else to notice my expression. “I’m…sorry. I didn’t realize…that the two of you were together.” I retreated a few steps to further avoid being in this situation.

“What’s going on?” Seo Dawon asked–his tone sounded odd.

I tried to press down on my agitation by applying pressure to my voice box, trying to strengthen my voice. “Later…. I’ll tell you later.”

“Hmm? Because of me? Don’t mind me–I’m fine,” Ryu Hyerin said in a friendly voice, trying to dissuade me and grabbing onto me. I saw a diamond ring–suitable for marriage proposals–on the ring finger of her left hand that she used to hold onto me.

‘…Did Seo Dawon give that to her?’

Even though I knew this wasn’t the time to be having those thoughts, these thoughts unstoppably forced themselves into my mind. Lest my distorted expression be perceived, I bowed my head even more.

“Hyerin-ah, I’ll pick you up in the evening.” Seo Dawon was the one who ended this ambiguous situation.

I raised my head at Seo Dawon's words; he was smiling at Ryu Hyerin with a face that seemed to ask her for her understanding. Ryu Hyerin looked disappointed, but soon chicly smiled and picked up her handbag. "Tch… So you're asking me to leave now? I was going to stay with you until evening."

"I can't concentrate on work with you here."

"I guess if you can't speak with me here…" Ryu Hyerin smiled brightly, as if she was in a good mood, and turned towards me. "See you next time, Garam-ah."

Seo Dawon left the room with her to see her off. It was until his presence felt distant that I flopped down in an empty chair with a deep sigh.

"Haah…" I wiped my face with my hands. When I remembered how Seo Dawon had smiled at her with his eyes–the first time I'd ever seen that–annoyance suddenly rose within me. He'd never smiled like that to me… And, what? He couldn't focus on work with her there?

"That's so cheesy?" I said, voicing my childish envy. If Seo Dawon were in front of me right now, I would have wanted to slap him on the back.

Click–

It was then.

As soon as I said that, the door suddenly burst open; startled, I jumped out of my seat. Contrary to my expectations, Seo Dawon wasn't the one to enter the room.

"Uh…H-How did you come here…"

"Where's guild master-nim?" An unsmiling face, lowered eyes… Bae Jaemin asked perfunctorily.

* * *

“Was Hyerin-ssi here?”

I meant to reflexively answer him, but Bae Jaemin was quicker, blinking and murmuring to himself. It was surprising how quickly he deduced that. I clamped my lips tightly shut; Bae Jaemin glanced at me before striding inside.

I was incredibly uncomfortable, but I couldn’t kick him out since this wasn’t my room; I simply stepped back, creating distance between us. Jung Garam was infamous for his hatred of the Priest, so I didn’t think he’d pay any mind to my vigilance.

As expected, Bae Jaemin quietly sat in an empty chair without blinking an eye at me. As I pretended to not notice Bae Jaemin, I became certain of one thing.

‘Bae Jaemin also… really hates Jung Garam.’

At a surface glance, others may think that Jung Garam was the only one fastidious in his dislike, but, looking at the Priest’s attitude now that the two of us are alone, I could see that Bae Jaemin didn’t care for Jung Garam either. However, he was clever enough to reign in his rudeness towards Jung Garam in front of others. That was why Jung Garam, every day, seemed like someone creating a mountain out of a molehill.

While glaring at the back of Bae Jaemin’s head, I inwardly clicked my tongue. Now that I had become Jung Garam, I thought his double-faced personality was even more despicable.

‘Ah, but… I wanted to report how suspicious Bae Jaemin is when Seo Dawon returns, but what should I say if this bastard is still here?’

Looking at him, I was at a loss for what to do. Even if I were to speak vaguely, Bae Jaemin may perceive that we were talking about him.

However, I could not think about this issue further.

“Mm? What’s up with you, Jaemin-ie?” Seo Dawon had opened the door and entered.

Though the Priest maintained an expressionless face right before, he adopted a smile as soon as he saw Seo Dawon entering the room.

I couldn’t believe how dynamic his change in expression was. Previously, he sat with his eyes wide open, exuding a gloomy aura; now, he became a bright, prosperous young master. He could probably pass any snags in any interviews or meetings. Garam definitely didn’t call him a disgusting abomination for no reason.

“I’ve found the assassination client and am reporting in,” Bae Jaemin said.

“Really? You’ve found him sooner than expected.”

“Everyone trembled just by the mention of Guild Master-nim’s name. It was easy to gain their cooperation.”

The Priest had even stealthily slipped in some flattery within his words.

Seo Dawon didn’t confirm nor deny Bae Jaemin’s claim, but considering how carefully he read the documents the Priest handed over, the report didn’t seem too bad.

The Mage was so savage to the other when they had last talked; perhaps their conversation ended well, the aura surrounding them was bright and refreshing. I, of course, was disconcerted by that conversational flow.

“So… in your opinion, you think the Assassin was commissioned by Virtuoso Workshop?”

“Yes. The data I’ve given you is from the accounting office. The accounting office has long dealt with the Virtuoso Workshop. We believe they had hired a ‘freelancer’ with pre-laundered slush funds [1].”

“The Assassin has no affiliations?”

“Not to my knowledge.”

“Alright. Good Job.”

Bae Jaemin reported his work sincerely; I stared between the two, mouth dry. In this scenario, I didn’t think it would go over very well if I were to shout that Bae Jaemin was suspicious.

“Then, I’ll be on my way. Please contact me if there’s something else that needs to be confirmed. Feel free to speak with me comfortably,” Bae Jaemin said.

“See you tomorrow.”

Surprisingly, Bae Jaemin didn’t linger and was the one to retreat from the conversation first. After finishing his report, he left the room without looking backwards–just like a faithful office worker.

Even after Bae Jaemin left, Seo Dawon read various reports as if he were absorbed in his work …Though I was still inside the room, I thought the Mage had immersed himself until he had forgotten my presence.

“Garam-ah. Did you just come here to play?”

“N-no…”

Of course, I had thought wrong–a brief illusory moment of calm. Seo Dawon stealthily glanced at the clock before turning back to me.

I didn’t know how far I could push my luck, so I chewed at my lips as I returned his gaze. On the other hand, Seo Dawon seemed relaxed and leisurely.

“…Does hyung also think I’m making a big deal about Bae Jaemin?” After a deep sigh, the words I uttered were so pathetic–one could mistake it for mere whining. I had wanted to say something more professional and objective, but… As expected, that was beyond me at the moment.

However, Seo Dawon looked calmly at me without smiling or frowning. “You have a good intuition.”

As he spoke, the Mage set aside Bae Jaemin’s report–the one he had been reading just seconds ago. It was an unspoken promise to listen to me till the very end, just as he had done for the Priest.

I was on one hand graceful but, on the other, I felt pressure in the pit of my stomach as I recalled how the Mage had been checking the clock. If I continue to stutter, Seo Dawon would probably rise from his seat and say we should continue to talk another time…

‘……No. This isn’t the time to think like that.’ I erased my thoughts before I could get off topic. [2]

I steeled my expression and said, “I think Bae Jaemin…is lying about something.”

“But you don’t have evidence yet–is that it?” Seo Dawon smiled jokingly; he seemed to have already understood all my inward conclusions. I nodded my heavy head.

Seo Dawon closed his eyes briefly–as if he were contemplating something–then opened his mouth. “I’ll craft an excuse for you, so go ahead and follow him until you’re satisfied.”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung: “If I see Bae Jaemin, it’s on sight!”

I’m slower because my dissertation is due soon but I’ll pick up when the arc starts more in earnest! I just wanna translate and not write T_T

Patreon chap will go up later tonight!!

Footnotes

1. Slush fund = Money set aside and used for illicit purposes (like political bribery)
2. (about to fall into Samcheonpo) is a proverb that denotes how 1 person was trying to get to Jinju but lost his way and found another city (Samcheonpo). Hence, this means getting off topic/losing your way.

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Chapter 195

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I nearly bowed to Seo Dawon and shouted thank you at him. However, without giving me a chance to languish in gratitude, he shot me a cool look. “However, this time I’ll need solid evidence.”

He spoke as if he would no longer tolerate these sorts of words in the future if I couldn’t figure out what was so suspicious about Bae Jaemin.

I thought Seo Dawon had infinite trust in Jung Garam, but I flinched when that belief was shattered. At some point he would draw the line and treat me as the head of a guild would. “…Understood,” I said.

However, Seo Dawon was the one to draw me, who had flinched at his attitude, back into an affectionate mood again.

Seo Dawon looked at me before placing his hands over my bangs. Then, with an expression that didn’t hide how cute he found me, he began tousling my hair.

“What is this, all of a sudden…” I had never even received this sort of affection from my father; naturally, I freaked out and avoided his hand.

However, Seo Dawon ignored my attitude and continued as normal. It was as if, now that official business had completed, we moved onto a private conversation. “Did you eat?”

“I didn’t…”

“Eat with me.”

“But, Ryu Hyerin-ssi and you are…”

“What about Hyerin-ie?”

When I looked like I wanted to bite myself at the slip of the tongue, Seo Dawon only laughed instead of interrogating me further. It was as if he knew what I wanted to say…

“There’s still a few hours left until dinner,” he said.

“……”

“If not, do you want to join Hyerin-ie and me later?”

“What? No! I don’t want to.”

“It’s better to eat with just the two of us, right?” Seo Dawon had clearly never been rejected before. Eventually, I sighed and followed his lead.

* * *

“It’s good to see you, Seo Dawon-ssi.”

Seo Dawon took me, in his car, to a luxurious restaurant on the city outskirts. The appearance or the service level of the staff was quite extraordinary; the menu we were handed had no prices listed. Nevertheless, the spacious restaurant was filled with people.

Even among those gathered, Seo Dawon was a spectacle. Because the restaurant boasted an open floor plan, I could feel the others’ piercing gazes; trying to ignore the stares combined with the pressure of such a high-class restaurant, it was hard to stay calm.

“The fish here is decent.” Of course, Seo Dawon was calm. Furthermore, before I could peruse through the menu properly, he had finished ordering my share.

Considering how I could barely pronounce the menu items, it was probably better for Seo Dawon to choose. However, I inwardly sighed when I thought about what his proficiency in these sorts of situations meant for his life experiences.

“Ohoh. If it isn’t Seo Dawon-ssi!”

However, those thoughts were cut short. Someone suddenly, and quickly, approached our table.

I turned towards the approaching people, wondering if I should block their approach, and opened my eyes wide. Another familiar face again. To be exact, one of the approaching men was the last person I had expected to see.

‘…That’s Moon Issak?’

The nerves in my body alighted sharply as I stared at Moon Issak. Perhaps he noticed my gaze–he glowered at me without blinking once. [1]

His gaze was more vigilant and weighty than what I remembered from when I was in my own body… What was more concerning were the people in Moon Issak’s company. In particular, the chubby man at the forefront wore a smile–in contrast to Moon Issak’s impassive face–as he reached a hand out to Seo Dawon.

“Congressman-nim.” Speaking of smiles, Seo Dawon’s bright smile filled his face as well. I–how should I say this… Should I say that I felt elements of steadfastness, reliability, and professionalism from that smile? I inadvertently stared, startled by the Mage’s expression.

Moon Issak’s companions, who seemed to be on their way out after a meal, blushed and smiled heartily when they saw Seo Dawon’s expression. The chubby man grabbed Seo Dawon’s hand and continued on into a more

private conversation. “Ohoho, it’s been almost 2 months since I last saw you in Jeju.”

“That’s right. How have you been?”

“Hahaha, me? Well, I’m always the same. Rather than me, I think our Guild Master-nim [2] would have been far busier.” The man at the front of the party clung onto the Mage’s hands, busily raising his voice–it was as if he were announcing to all here his life’s most important networking connection.

In particular, he kept on using words like ‘Red Lotus’ and ‘Guild Master,’ like he wanted everyone in this restaurant to recognize Red Lotus’s Seo Dawon.

If it were me, I wouldn’t be able to maintain a straight face next to such a burdensome person… Seo Dawon didn’t even cringe and was perfectly attuned to the other’s beat.

And, Moon Issak was…

‘He seems to…hate Seo Dawon a lot?’

He stood far away from the Mage, eyes lowered and mouth closed in a tight line. Still, the negative emotions that he could not fully bury had permeated into his body language.

Surprisingly, though, Seo Dawon talked happily with the ‘Congressmen’ surrounding him before finally turning towards Moon Issak, as if he just now noticed the man. He called out in an innocent voice, “And this person is…”

“Ah! He’s administrative assistant Moon Issak… He’s a very competent friend. [3] Didn’t you see him once in Jeju?”

“Did I?”

“…Nice to meet you again. I’m called Moon Issak.”

Seo Dawon only grinned after receiving Moon Issak's greeting. That was to say… he dragged the lull until the person who had greeted him felt a bit ashamed.

However, the other lawmakers didn't rebuke or say anything to Seo Dawon. They simply smiled genially and moved away, promising to meet again 'next time.' Moon Issak bowed deeply and slowly straightened his back again. I clearly saw that he looked as if he was holding in his irritation before he twirled around and left the restaurant.

"Do you…hate Moon Issak?" When dining service, which had been paused temporarily due to the interrupting conversation, I stirred the soup in front of me and asked the Mage an abrupt question. The relationship between Seo Dawon and Moon Issak concerned me.

However, Seo Dawon responded indifferently, as if it weren't a big deal. "No?"

"But then, why…? Um…"

"You want to know why I gave him a hard time?"

"Yes…"

"He was weirdly abrasive from the first time we met."

"Huh….?"

"Well, live a long enough life and there will be people you hate for no reason at all. I guess he just didn't like me."

Moon Issak picked a fight with him first? However, Seo Dawon seemed to have used his status and connections to skillfully mess with him–to treat him as subordinate…

Perhaps he read something from my expression, Seo Dawon lightly took a sip of his soup before saying, "So, I decided to give him a reason."

"Ah…"

“But, the funny thing about him… Now that I’ve messed with him a few times like this, he waited for me in the bathroom and attacked me the last time I was in Jeju island.”

“What did you say?” I looked at Seo Dawon, surprised.

However, he simply blinked his eyes and shrugged, as if he were reminiscing about something quite amusing. “He endures me well. Garam-ie, is he possibly to your taste…?”

“Huh? W-What?”

“I smashed the bones in the back of his hand, and he didn’t groan even once.”

Crazy….. What on earth happened between you two? Furthermore, doing things like that… What was with him reminiscing about something like that as if it were something fun? I lost my appetite; I placed down the spoon that I had been using to stir my soup.

“What’s wrong? It doesn’t taste good?”

“It’s just… Mm, I’ll eat later.”

Seo Dawon was being kind when he asked me that question, but I refused him while cold sweat. I remembered the few times I rebelled against Seo Dawon since I had met him. I even called him a pervert… Now that I think about it, there were many fortunate incidents where the Mage had let me slide.

‘Seo Dawon is… incredibly generous to those that he considers within his boundaries.’ [4]

Then, something abruptly occurred to me. What did Seo Dawon think when Ryu Hyerin betrayed him?

“Hyung… Hypothetically…”

“Hm?”

“If I were to make a huge mistake in regards to Hyung… Will you forgive me?”

“What is this all of a sudden?”

“…It’s just, well… Things like that could happen in life.” Though I pretended to be joking, the ends of my sentences sounded shaky.

Seo Dawon stared at me absentmindedly, “What would constitute a ‘huge mistake’?”

“…Ruining what Hyung has been working towards, losing all your money… A mistake that would ruin Hyung’s life.”

“And how could you make a mistake like that?”

“So, that’s why I said hypothetically…” I stabbed my innocent soup with my fork while avoiding Seo Dawon’s persistent eyes. Now that I’d spoken out loud, I wanted him to dismiss my words as emotionally charged nonsense.

“If you beg for forgiveness, I’ll have to grant it at least once.”

“……”

“After all, that’s what you do with mistakes.”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL:
Seo Dawon: “So, I decided to give him a reason.”

That’s the level of pettiness I sometimes aspire to have.

Footnotes

1. To be exact, not blinking, in this situation, means not faltering in his movements/actions. I translated a bit literally here since I felt that English had similar nuances, but I might localize this in the future.
2. ‘Our’ guild master-nim, of course, refers to Seo Dawon. Seo Dawon isn’t his guild master, but the “our” here denotes intimacy or friendliness.
3. Friend, here, doesn’t actually mean friend. Think of it more as ‘person I know’.
4. Aka ‘his’ people.

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Seo Dawon answered my question as if it were some trivial matter. Then, he asked, “But, did something happen today?”

“…..”

“Did something perturb you?” Concern filled his kind expression.

However, now that I thought about it, what I had just said wasn’t something Garam-ie would have said, so I just kept quiet. The Seo Dawon in front of me would probably respect my decision to keep quiet rather than doubt me.

As expected, Seo Dawon did not say anything to me even if I didn’t respond. He continued eating quietly without overwhelming me–as if he would be there any time I wanted to speak to him.

Near the end of our meal, Seo Dawon paid for the check and asked obliquely, “How are you and Kyung-sik these days?”

“…Not bad.”

“There’s no suspicious movements/stirrings?”

“Yes.”

Things were quiet when I had left this morning; Choi Kyung-sik also seemed quite placid from someone whose life was actively in danger. I

easily answered the Mage’s question.

Blink blink–

However, as soon as I said that, the red light– the alert for the [Message Notification] window–suddenly flickered in the lower right corner of my field of view. It seemed like I wasn’t the only one that was sent a message; Seo Dawon, who had been relaxed so far, frowned.

[You’ve received an urgent message from the ‘Red Lotus’ channel.]

When I rushed to touch the bottom of the message, an alarm from Bang Eunji–accompanied by an [Emergency Message] alert-manifested before me.

[Bang Eunji: There’s been an ambush. I’ve sent the Dungeon coordinates below.]

[Bang Eunji: So far, five enemy personnel have been identified. Requesting support from all nearby guild members.]

When I read the incoming message, I looked at Seo Dawon in surprise. However, rather than being tense and anxious, he sighed in frustration. “It’s a good thing we ate early. Let’s go.”

Then, Seo Dawon firmly grabbed hold of my arm. Gold lines–the same that always appeared whenever the Mage used his skills–coiled around our bodies.

“[Warp].”

* * *

[Entering the dungeon, ‘Lost in the Immortal Realm‘.]

Using the coordinates sent by Bang Eunji, we arrived at a dungeon called [Lost in the Immortal Realm].

Choi Kyung-sik had mentioned that he needed to level up before the [Second Company] raid; it was probably for that reason he had arrived at this dungeon with Bang Eunji today.

The problem, though, was that this information had been leaked and they were ambushed as they were proceeding through the dungeon.

Dungeons were structured so that new Users could enter and exit at any time, even if someone had entered the raid instance first. To make matters more difficult, one’s resources were often slim if someone intentionally aimed for that time period and launched a surprise attack. After all, in a situation where monsters lied ahead and assassins chased from behind, unless one was a competent User it would be difficult to escape from that dilemma.

In particular, monsters would often chase the first target they saw until the bitter end. There would be a high probability of running into the dangerous scenario where the assassins and monsters worked in tandem.

“[Mapping].” Therefore, I used the [Mapping] skill to quickly find a path before Seo Dawon could urge me to do so.

A familiar holographic simulation manifested, displaying the complex structures and obstacles in the dungeon one after the other.

Seo Dawon tapped my shoulder as he watched the map fill in from my side. “There’re more than five assassins.”

“…What?”

“Look at the dungeon population count.”

Next to the value that indicated how many traps were in the dungeon, there was a number that indicated how many people were present. Subtracting me, Seo Dawon, Bang Eunji, and Choi Kyung-sik, there were more than 30 people here.

“Eunji also has skills similar to [Mapping]. She wouldn’t have called us for merely five assassins.”

“Ah.”

“The route to the boss room is futile. Eunji and Kyung-sik must be hiding in one of the trap rooms.”

Gloomily enough the issue was that there were a total of 78 traps in the [Lost in the Immortal Realm] dungeon.

The [Lost in the Immortal Realm] dungeon was roughly divided into two parts. One side–[Normal Mode]–was the path to the smaller Boss monster room, the other side was of course the [Hardcore] route. In short, that path led to the real master of this dungeon.

Of course, there were slightly more traps in the [Hardcore] side. Seo Dawon looked at the 80% completed map and immediately barked orders to me–without hesitation–when he saw the diverging path. “You should check the [Normal Mode] side. I’ll go to the [Hardcore] path.”

“We’re splitting up?”

“It’s faster that way.”

I was momentarily nervous, but, when I remembered that I was currently possessing Jung Garam’s body, my mind began to calm down. “Alright.”

“The other guys will be arriving soon.”

“Ah… yes.”

“Keep on checking your messages. Also, constantly update on the already checked traps.”

“Yes!”

After speaking, Seo Dawon strode ahead with his long legs and disappeared into the [Hardcore] route. Staring blankly at the darkness that had swallowed the Mage’s back, I rushed to the beginning of the [Normal Mode] route entrance while trying to shake off my anxious thoughts.

* * *

Regardless of my worries, the entrance of the [Normal Mode] route was empty.

Even when I first entered, no monsters approached me nor were there any scenario alarms; all that unfolded before me was the dark and spacious cave passageway and a faraway dim light.

There were no full-scale traps here–they were placed after this long passage.

“Where are…my useful skills…” So, to make this boring road pass by a bit faster, I called up Jung Garam’s [Equipped Skill List] without stopping in my run.

Even though I was running incomparably fast–incomparable to my speed when I was in my own body–I wracked my brain for something similar to a Mage’s [Warp] skill.

However, unlike my poor skill list that had less than 10 skills, Jung Garam’s skill list was so extensive that I couldn’t see its end no matter how diligently I scrolled down. Still, I picked out a few skills that had caught my

eye; the problem, though, was that all the skill descriptions sounded similar. I had no idea which skill was better than the other.

–Swift: Increase movement speed by 100% for 30 seconds.

–Prompt Action: Ignore the distance from you to the target–approach your target quickly (Cooldown time 10 minutes)

–High Speed: Move quickly while hugging the wall.

–Sprint: You can run faster by consuming a portion of your HP.

I couldn't understand even when I read the descriptions. The time was running out so I decided to first use them all–in order from [Swift] to [Sprint].

"[Swift]…. Uwaaaaahhhhgh!"

As soon as I uttered [Swift], my speed increased, almost bowling my body forward.

It felt like someone was pushing me from behind? My body felt buffeted by strong tailwinds; my speed suddenly increased so fast that I could not control my body and almost staggered.

"A-Ahhhhgh!" Screaming, I regretted my decisions, but there was no way to stop my legs that had already sprung out, one after the other. "W-Wait a minute!!!"

And, just 30 seconds after [Swift] had been activated, I was approaching the light that had seemed so far away at a tremendous speed. Screaming once more, I closed my eyes; I felt, forebodingly, like my body was floating.

[You've entered the Normal mode route of 'Lost in the Immortal Realm']

[Scenario 'Sumptuous Feast ( )' has begun.] [1]

And, as soon as I was flung into the light, the [System Message] automatically read itself, as if the system was taunting me.

It's like… It was informing me that I was screwed. Still, I quickly adapted to the blinding, dazzling light; I quickly opened my eyes in order to see what kind of monster had appeared before me.

However, contrary to what I expected, I was faced with beautiful, foggy mountain peaks and cliffs, flowing blue rivers–a picturesque home for the gods.

"Ah–Aaaaaahhhh!"

Unfortunately, though, I was currently being flung into that magnificent landscape. Because I couldn't control my speed while running, I would plummet off a cliff into a river with deep and strong rapids.

Furthermore, the cliff had a smooth stone face with no handholds… Eventually, I desperately screamed one last time as I watched the river get closer.

TL: Hi guys, Really quick update before I gotta go! My dissertation is due soon so I've been super duper busy >.<

Footnotes

1. ( ) (Ju Ji Yong Rim) means banquet or sumptuous feast–to make a pond with alcohol, and forest with meat. The term comes from the tale that Emperor Zhou of the Yin Dynasty was said to have filled moats with alcohol and nailed meat to the forest while feasting. This, ofc, is another idiom for how wealthy that emperor was.

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Chapter 197

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“I survived because I’m Jung Garam right now…”

That was what I thought as I crawled up onto the shore. Like a fool, I couldn’t control the strength of my skill, and I sprinted off a cliff, plummeting into the grand valley below.

Fortunately, Jung Garam’s body was able to hold its breath underwater for a very long time. Of course, it was as frustrating as breathing in a humid sauna, but I was still able to breathe. Therefore, I was able to avoid drowning.

“Haah… By the way, what’s wrong with the map here…”

After narrowly managing to crawl to shore, I checked where I was in the dungeon. I tried to manifest the map and confirm my location, but, as soon as I tried to use the skill, a system message blinked at me. [The map can’t be loaded now]. The skill didn’t activate.

[**Seo Dawon:** I think I’ve been caught by this dungeon’s [Maze]…]
[**Seo Dawon:** I keep coming back to the same spot for a while now]
[**Bang Eunji:** Yes, I also tried to send the exact coordinates inside the dungeon but failed.]
[**Seo Dawon:** Then, I’ll just break it down one by one and come to you]
[**Seo Dawon:** Is Kyung-sik-ie alright?]
[**Bang Eunji:** Thanks to my wonderful performance, we haven’t been hurt.]

[**Bang Eunji:** It’s just that today, once again, he’s luggage hehe]
[**Choi Kyung-sik:** TT_TT]

Looking at their conversation, I assumed that [Maze] was a skill that neutralized all skills that generated coordinates.

After reading Seo Dawon and Bang Eunji’s shared messages, I shook the dust off my body and got up without replying. For now, I decided to head straight along the road in front of me. The forest road continued endlessly.

“Is this the right way to go? There are no monsters appearing… Not that I want them to appear…”

The issue, though, was that the road progressed far too leisurely than expected for a dungeon.

Of course, the scenic view couldn’t have been better. It wasn’t like the grime or bizarre dungeons I had been to in the past; heavenly natural scenery gradually peeped out of the fog–akin to something one might see in a xianxia [1] In addition, bamboo forest spread out from both sides of the road, wafting its subtle scent past my nose.

[OooKkiKki!]

“What is… that?”

However, Jung Garam’s perceptive body soon detected something strange.

When I focused on a black shadow zooming through the bamboo forest, my gaze quickly zoomed in like the lens of a camera. When I looked at the moving shadow again, this time I could identify it.

Dozens of monkeys, that sported golden fur growing from the middle of its forehead, were crawling up the bamboo trees while observing me with

their gleaming eyes. They exuded violent intent unique to monsters, but I was able to relax slightly when I saw their names.

[Son Wukong’s Children] [2]

The monster’s name, above their heads, was colored green.

Except for Boss or Named monsters, the titles that appeared above the mob’s heads were all colored differently. The color was determined according to the level of the User that saw the monster; if the monster’s level was lower and significantly weaker than the User, its name was displayed in green.

In contrast, if the monster’s level was significantly higher and the User would have a difficult time dealing with it, the monster’s name would shine red. In other words, “Son Wukong’s Children” were monsters that Jung Garam could easily beat even if hundreds of them were to attack en masse.

Maybe the enemies had their own ways of measuring a User’s ability; the monsters simply observed me from far away without rushing in.

“Ah, then… Maybe it wasn’t that the road here was too leisurely– perhaps all the enemies just couldn’t attack me?”

Jung Garam, you’re really amazing?!

After realizing that, I glanced down at Jung Garam’s two arms in surprise. I hadn’t even taken out a dagger yet–to think that this unarmed body could generate enough force to discourage a monster from attacking…

[We’ve built our king a pond out of alcohol.]

However, my relaxed attitude soon came to an end. In the blink of an eye, the path led out of the bamboo forest. The way in front of me was hidden by thick fog–thicker than before–so, I could hardly see an inch ahead.

Then, as soon as I briefly paused, a coquettish voice wrapped around my ears before scattering into the wind. Simultaneously, I sniffed the fragrant sweet scent of alcohol.

[In his hands, we placed meat that would melt on the tongue and even more gentle, beautiful women.]

“Inventory!”

I took out the dagger stored in the inventory at the unusual aura that surrounded me. However, the enemy–still unrevealed–continued to monologue mockingly in a lilting sing-song voice.

[Jump around in this paradise all night. Forget all the weary and exhausting times…]

When at last the monologue finished, the fog cleared as if it had been washed away. Seven immortal fairies wearing silk appeared before me.

They were all dressed in different colors, but their beautiful faces were the same; their feet may have been exposed underneath the skirts if not for the clouds that hid them. Surprisingly, they stood on clouds–not the ground–as they looked towards me.

In addition, beneath the fairies‘ floating feet, a huge pond with the terrible stench of alcohol had appeared.

The lotus flowers floating on the pond surface were all made of gold, the crucian carps that occasionally surfaced were created from jewels, moreover, there were extravagant dolls attached to the submerged waterwheel. As that wheel turned, the captured carps splashed about.

Furthermore, there was a huge boat floating behind the fairies; on that luxurious boat shaped like a white dragon, people laughed and twirled around–a lavish banquet was being held atop the boat.

[Immortal Shadow Fairy]

On top of all that, the names above the heads of the fairies were colored orange. Of course, that was better than red, but it still meant that these monsters weren't as weak as the green ones that couldn't dare attack me.

Anxious, I fixed my grip on Garam's dagger and lowered my center of gravity. As soon as I bent my knees, the fairies smiled gently–all at the same time, as if they had rehearsed. Of course, the sight of seven human-shaped monsters smiling simultaneously was more gruesome than beautiful.

[We will make you happy.]

[Forget about all that makes you sad and weary.]

[Don't worry about the rising and setting sun.]

[Happiness lasts forever.]

[On the boat that floats above the alcohol pond.]

[The never-ending banquet is opening.]

The fairies, singing gracefully one verse at a time, rode their clouds and rose higher and higher.

Only then did I notice that each of them held an instrument within their arms. Though I couldn't tell what each instrument was, the immortal fairies soon commanded attention in this area by starting to play their gold and loquat seed studded instruments.

[Strum~~]

[The 'Immortal Shadow Fairies' performance has begun; the debuff has been applied. We recommend using earplugs!]

[Movement speed is reduced by 35%]

[Curse resistance has been disabled. 10… 9… 8…]

[Stamina has been greatly reduced.]

'…Is it a buff-type monster?'

When the fairies began performing–like a bard– and applying status ailments, I thought they would be quite difficult to handle. This time, I felt even more annoyed at the playfully sarcastic system message, such as recommending earplugs.

However, the [Immortal Shadow Fairies'] attacks did not directly damage me. Even if I were to try and get close to them, the monsters were floating atop the pond–I would have no foothold. Instead, I decided to ignore the debuff for now and focus on the white boat floating behind them.

'Are they all monsters…?'

After looking at the boat with a discerning eye, I fell silent as I noted that all the humanoid monsters on the boat had orange titles.

At a first glance, it seemed like there were hundreds of folks there… No matter how strong Jung Garam may be, would he be able to fight against all of them in an alcoholic pond arena? Furthermore, I haven't even seen the boss of this place yet.

'There are also assassins dotted throughout this dungeon…' I paused my movements, briefly contemplating my situation.

It was then.

Swish–!

The airflow shifted unusually; I reflexively turned my head to the right. Immediately, a sound of air ripping passed by, brushing past my ear.

After what felt like the gentle brush of an arrow shaft against my cheek, I checked what direction the attack flew from. I was able to quickly find the archer. The archer did not bother to hide and, even for such a fancy boat party, he was peerless in his clothed finery.

[What an amusing goldfish.]

From the stern of the ship, a man with long hair, crimson inner-clothes, and blue outer robes [3] stared at me while laxly gripping a bow that spanned his height. Contrary to his disappointed–upset that he'd missed his shot–gaze, the man's cheeks were flushed pink, and his mouth smiled innocently.

My breath faltered when I saw the star symbol that marked this man as a boss monster above his head.

['De Xin' has acknowledged you. Boss Monster, 'Lord Zhou Di Xin's large-scale attack will begin in 5 seconds.] [4]

The moment I read the man’s name above his head, a system message had popped up. Simultaneously, the boss monster, [De Xin], looked back and barked orders to those on the ship.

[The hunting party will now begin.]

The group of people that had been joyfully laughing stopped in the middle of their merriment. The dancers turned to look at me; the immortal fairies also stopped strumming and turned their gazes on me.

Then, raising his chin, [De Xin] broke the silence.

[Catch him alive.]

Become a Patron!

TL: There’s going to be a lot of uploads this week >.<

We’re in a Xianxia dungeon! I really personally like xianxia/mortal arts as backdrops for dungeons tbh.

Footnotes

1. Novels that take place in ancient China (or ancient Asia in general). The genre usually stars spiritual and martial power, cultivation, and immortals.
2. Son Wukong is a character that appears in Journey to the West. It takes the appearance of a monkey and is known to be both strong and mischievous. , as written in the original, is Son Wukong's nickname. Literally translated, it means 'A Sage as large as the sky.'
3.

4. De Xin is the posthumous name scholars gave to Lord Zhou (of the alcohol pool and meat forest legends). In Korean, it's actually pronounced 'Jeshin,' but I chose to use the more commonly known Chinese-English spelling.

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Swishhh–!

As soon as the boss monster, [De Xin], gave the command, arrows shot at me like javelins. There weren't only banquet guests that danced and played their time away; soldiers were also mixed within the masses. Before I knew it, the archers were aiming at me.

Black arrows flooded my vision for a moment, and I instinctively retreated. Before me, on the road, two arrows plunged into the ground.

'I… I don't know how I should move!'

I couldn't use Jung Garam's body properly. I barely managed to dodge the enemy's attacks, but I simply held my dagger while staring blankly at the boat. Would I be able to reach that far if I used a skill?

"Damn it… [Explosion]!"

Left with no choice, I summoned an [Explosion], the highest skill in his equipped skill list. As soon as I did so, a round bomb appeared above my palm; the ticking of its countdown echoed. I rolled the bomb around a few times within my hands–as if I were holding a hot potato–then immediately tossed it towards the boat.

Boom–!

However, was the trajectory of my throw too obvious? The bomb flew in a straight line, was shot by an arrow, and exploded in mid-air.

Boom–! B-Boom–! Crash!

However, I was ignorant of how the [Explosion] skill actually worked. The bomb was not finished when it exploded once, but the skill continued to expload in a chain reaction, detonating the shattered pieces. Because of this, the bomb exploded akin to a fireworks display in the air; one of the small fragments barely fell onto the ship.

Boom–!

After a loud bang, black smoke began rising from the sails, and fire began to spread. I looked at the scene, half-dazed, then looked at my hand.

‘Jung Garam… It’s not like I’m using White Phosphorus [1] or something–what kind of skill is this…’

I felt quite uncomfortable even as I used the skill…

However, victory was not won in a single blow. The arrow rain, which had been momentarily interrupted, began pouring down again. The black smoke from the burning sails had calmed down, as if the fire was slowly being smothered.

Furthermore, The fairies continued to curse me while singing their beautiful melodies, paying no heed to whether or not the ship behind them caught on fire.

[Magic Resistance is greatly reduced]

[Defense is reduced by -20%]

[Damage from the bleeding status effect has increased]

[Stamina has decreased.]

[Critical hit chance has been greatly reduced.]

‘Annoying…’

I should honestly deal with the fairies first, but the alcohol-filled pond under their feet was still problematic.

It wasn’t that the pond looked too deep; the idea that something was lurking beneath the surface made me uncomfortable. Plus, there may be devices built under the pond… For some reason, I got the feeling that I’d be in trouble if I approached willy nilly.

Splash–!

However, while I was hesitating, something–a small kayak?–began descending from the large boat.

That small kayak was colored black with a white stern in the shape of an eagle. 10 men wearing triangular straw hats with shining swords rode atop that small boat. I looked above their heads.

[De Xin’s Royal Bodyguards]

The man at the forefront of the guard was the only one wearing a black straw hat; the traditional Korean overcoat he wore was white and glossy. In addition… even more concerning, his name was a darker orange than the others.

‘The Royal Guard has already been deployed?’

When the boss appeared in a dungeon, there were always guards or additional mobs that appeared with them. It’d be nice to only focus on the boss, but guard monsters were loyal to their masters and showed a different level of combat power compared to their ordinary monster counterparts.

Furthermore, the monsters did not seek to spare their own bodies because they were an existence that lived for the boss; many Users were

killed or injured due to the Guard's reckless attacks. Therefore, I had no choice but to focus all my attention on them from the moment I identified the monsters.

"…W-What!?"

However, regardless of how I strived to mentally prepare myself, the small kayak they rode raced forward at a speed that greatly exceeded my expectations. Flustered, I ran around the border of the pond. I judged that it would probably be better to deal with the fairies rather than the Royal Guard.

However, while running along the edge, the pond seemed briefly transparent due to the angle of the moonlight hitting the water's surface. Surprised by the terrible sight within, I automatically stopped breathing.

Numerous people laid there–sunken beneath the pond's surface. The corpses stood upright in the water; looking closer, all the bodies were tied to thick wooden pillars.

I didn't know if the corpses were left to sink beneath the water by the weight of the logs or if a living person was tied down in order to drown them… Nonetheless, this was a knee-shaking sight. Even in the waters near the white boat, where the vessel floated slowly, the corpses' heads briefly bobbed to the surface before sinking down again.

[You've found a hint for the Scenario – 'Neverending Banquet.']

Thanks to the system message notification, I was shaken from my dumbfounded daze at such a brutal sight. I blinked my stiff eyes and turned to face the Royal Guard approaching me. Then, I fixed my loose grip on the dagger, holding it in reverse.

'There's no way I'm entering that pond–even if I die…'

I was at a dead end anyway; I had no choice.

[The hunting banquet is now beginning.]

Just then, the man in the black hat, standing in the point position, stopped walking, looked down at me, and barked orders to the rest of the guards standing behind him.

[As long as he’s alive, his physical condition doesn’t matter. Drag him here.]

[Understood!] [2]

The guards responded and jumped off the kayak simultaneously. Contrary to their large size, their dive created a small, quiet splash. Only their triangular bamboo hats were left, floating on the water’s surface.

I couldn’t decide on my next actions, so, for now, I manifested the [Skill List], made it translucent, and left it floating in the upper left corner of my view. This was a temporary measure to find and use the skills I needed while making sure my view wasn’t blocked.

Swoosh–!

Right then, a very small, thin syringe needle–invisible to Jung Garam’s eyes–flew towards me. Though I bent my very flexible waist backwards and avoided it, cold sweat flowed down my back. The needle flew at a completely different speed than the arrows I had avoided just earlier.

‘They’re completely different from regular monsters… The arrow rain was nothing in comparison.’

What’s worse, I hadn’t the faintest idea where the royal bodyguards were located within the pond–I could only see the abandoned floating hats. After much consideration, I called forth another skill. “[Explosion]!”

Then, I thew the bomb below the water’s surface.

Plop–!

However, nothing happened after the explosion except for a lone, tall waterspray. The submerged bomb probably couldn't defeat a single guard monster. Furthermore, after the water spout eruption, the water rippled strangely, making it hard to see inside. I had failed to create an opportunity for myself.

It was then.

[Shuriken.]

Suddenly, I felt a cold energy beneath my waist; the royal bodyguards' bloodthirst erupted.

"Eeek!" A strange sound ripped out of me as I stepped to avoid a guard's sword aimed at my ankle. I managed to avoid the attack by jumping incredibly high, but I couldn't change my position midair.

'No…!'

Perhaps the blade aimed at my ankle was mere bait or perhaps the monsters planned for a time-difference attack pattern… the thin needles that I had seen earlier began to fly directly at my forehead.

I clenched my teeth and tilted my head backwards. I began to hear the curious fairies' melody again; my body moved half a beat slower than I expected. As soon as I–face paling–thought I was doomed…

"[Barrier]."

Clank–!

Suddenly, a small, blue protective film formed between me and the syringe needle. The needle lost its momentum and fell to the ground.

Startled, I turned to look at who protected me with their skill. An unexpected person stood before me.

"How did you…" I trailed off.

The expressionless man, reaching his hand out towards me, was definitely… Bae Jaemin. “What do you mean ‘how.’ Didn’t you also receive Eunji’s SOS?”

“……” It felt like I had briefly stopped thinking. It was already shocking that Bae Jaemin had appeared before me, but it was especially unbelievable to see that the Priest would use [Barrier] to save me.

However, Bae Jaemin only gave a subtle grimace at my expression and turned away from me. It didn’t seem like he was waiting for my response.

He stretched out one hand and took his staff out of the inventory. The staff was delicate and beautiful, engraved with his god’s words and jewels. Light accompanied the staff as it exited the Priest’s inventory.

Moreover, Bae Jaemin’s surprising behavior didn’t stop there. He opened the skill book with his other hand and accurately pointed his staff at me. Then, he started to apply buffs to my body, one after the other.

“[This blessing arises from five springs. Like a flowing spring, it washes away unclean energy; while the sun has risen, nothing can harm ‘Jung Garam.’ The night’s wolves will not be able to hide their claws; the dirty souls can’t dare lift their heads. This covenant is this, ‘Bae Jaemin’s’, blessing; the blood running through his and Mother Earth’s veins shan’t be cursed.]”

[Exhaustion levels have been reset.]

[Physical and Magic Power has been increased by 200%]

[Your attacks will ignore enemy defense (10 minutes remaining)]

[Accuracy and Concentration has been greatly increased. Critical chance has been increased by 50%]

[Defense has increased by 30%]

[During daytime, skill attack power increased by 50%]

[At a low chance, damage received can be countered for 50% of its strength with additional damage done to the enemy.]

[Movement speed increased by 100%]

[Additional damage added to all attacks (+50%)]

TL: Sorry for the late chap >.< My migraine really took me out yesterday. Patreon chap will go up later tonight!

Also, smh, Priest buffs are OP.

Footnotes

1. White phosphorus is pyrophoric (self-ignites on contact with air), burns fiercely, and can ignite cloth, fuel, ammunition, and other combustibles. Often used by the military for its offensive uses.
2. (jonmyung) is more like an exclamation to exalt someone's given command. It's a shout of respect. However…there's not really an equivalent in English. If you know a good equivalent, comment down below!

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Chapter 199

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Annoyingly, I felt so invigorated.

“…What are you doing?” The Priest said.

“What?”

“I gave you all the necessary buffs.” Bae Jaemin hurt my pride with his cold words that seemed to question why I was standing still when the Priest had done all he needed to do.

I glared at Bae Jaemin with eyes that didn’t even try to hide my frustration, but I was even more annoyed because the other wasn’t wrong. I didn’t want to seem clumsy in front of him.

‘Damn… The issue, though, is that I can’t figure out the best way to clear this dungeon.’

However–though the thought may make me tear up–it was true that my skills were dreadful, so it was difficult for me to take the initiative. If I were to advance clumsily, Bae Jaemin might notice my weird behavior…

So, after contemplating, I copied Jung Garam’s most unwilling and despicable face and said to the Priest, “You take the lead.”

“……?”

“How can I trust you enough to show you my back?”

At my words, Bae Jaemin's brows furrowed slightly. However, surprisingly, he didn't bother to argue further and took the lead smoothly. Perhaps he just didn't want to speak to me anymore, but… In any case, I was able to release a relieved sigh now that I'd escaped from Bae Jaemin's intimidating view.

Bae Jaemin walked out before me, closed the open skill book and vanished it, plunged the tip of his staff into the ground, and activated a simple skill. "[Search]."

Then, the hitherto unseen enemies gained a glowing red border, clearly showcasing their positions in the forest and pond. That skill probably temporarily revealed hidden enemies.

In the blink of an eye, I memorized the locations of the hidden enemies and threw daggers at them. "[Dark Counter]….Hngh!"

Since this was the first time I used the skill, I almost bit my tongue in surprise when my body moved automatically. However, thankfully, the skill activated properly; my body slid forward, cleanly decapitating the [De Xin Royal Guard] to my right from the chin up.

The enemy couldn't even shout or finish its death throes; he collapsed where he stood. Then, I leaned back–as far as possible–to avoid a sword that was about to dig itself into my armpit. Jung Garam's body moved acrobatically. Though I was a little stiff around the torso, it wasn't difficult to chain one movement into another.

"[Dark Gambit]!" Since the translucent skill window was still displayed before me, I could see the list of skills currently available. I was only reciting these abilities in order. Fortunately, though, it seemed like I chose well. My body moved oddly automatically, effortlessly approaching the next enemy.

Drawing closer, that bodyguard had what appeared to be fish scales tattooed on his face. Contrary to his terrifying appearance, though, the guard couldn't follow my movements and opened his mouth slightly in a memorably dumbfounded way.

It felt as if I alone could move freely within this paused world. I could clearly see how slow my opponent was; the guard could do nothing as my reflection could be clearly seen within his pupils.

As soon as I thought this fight might become boring, the royal guard blinked and closed his eyes. Simultaneously, my–now blue–dagger inserted itself between the guard's lips, and I ripped it horizontally.

[Cough…. C-Cough…!]

The [Dark Gambit] skill added an additional poison effect to the dagger. The guard with the torn lips soon began to have swollen cheeks, rolling on the floor while spitting up black blood.

Somehow, despite the brutal sight, my heart was beating calmly and consistently. I inwardly counted the seconds until the royal guard stopped moving and I could see the whites of his eyes before running towards the next enemy.

Because I turned around so rapidly, the next target briefly stopped, as if it were scared by my movements, before rushing towards me again. However, to my eyes, it seemed as if he were floundering in water. That was how slow he appeared.

'How should I put this… It's strangely amusing…'

Just like a comedy… It felt like I was watching a clown's over-exaggerated, ludicrous movements.

However, I only had a short time to appreciate this; I jumped off the ground, spring-loading enough strength into my thigh muscles that it felt like I'd explode. Using the enemy's spine as a stepping stone, I landed on his shoulders.

The enemy faltered under my weight, and he turned his head to look up at me. His small eyes revealed his inner thoughts–'Just when did he get up there?'. Instead of answering such a silly, unvoiced question, I smiled at the enemy, who was darkened by the shade of my shadow.

Clunk–!

That was probably the last thing the enemy saw. His head burst; the guard faltered and collapsed.

Stepping on the falling enemy's back, I jumped lightly and turned around. There were still many nearby monsters; the closest was right behind me. He was the owner of the lingering gaze that had been annoying me since long earlier.

Perhaps he was cautious; perhaps he was scared. That gaze kept following me at a barely tolerable distance, but its owner did not come any closer.

"Gasp!"

Was that why I heard a small gasp when I pinpointed the enemy directly with a glare? It sounded like he was pierced with fright.

As I slowly stared at the guard, I sensed something odd about him. I couldn't quite pinpoint what that was, but the man's general movement and behavior were a little different from a normal bodyguard.

"What's this?" Bae Jaemin, who walked ahead, mumbled to himself; the guard flinched and took a step back. Realizing that he was about to run away, I took a large step towards him. Then, in one movement, I grabbed him by the neck.

"A-Arghh! W-Wait!" he screamed.

I was about to grab my dagger and drive it under his chin. The guard threw his heavy sword onto the ground and trembled as he grabbed my wrist.

The man felt slippery to the touch with sweat; his face naturally frowned–a cringe. However, I swiftly stopped moving because of what he said. I'd never seen a monster trying to talk to a User before.

A monster could only spit out guttural, strange words; they couldn’t speak human language. The meaning of their words was directly conveyed into the brain, passed through some translator. Monster language was utterly different and couldn’t originate from a human’s voice box, so humans couldn’t pronounce monster words or imitate them. The same was true for monsters. However, the royal guard used human language to beg for his life.

Bae Jaemin, who quickly approached us from behind, muttered indifferently, “I think it’s a human?”

“T-That’s right. I’m not a monster!”

He was definitely wearing clothes worn by [De Xin’s Royal Guard], but the man hastily nodded, agreeing that he was human.

The man started to peel off thin skin–when the peels of skin had reached his neck, rather than [De Xin’s Royal Guard], a normal human man had appeared. Of course, he wasn’t someone I recognized.

“I was only wearing an item I had created. I’m not a monster…”

“Then, why observe us after wearing this disguise?”

The man broke out into a cold sweat at Bae Jaemin’s question, but he soon raised both hands in a surrender gesture. “I wasn’t keeping an eye on you… That is to say, I’m a Corpse Modiste… I can use a monster’s corpse to temporarily transform into that monster. I was moving within the mass of enemies in order to procure ingredients; I was just going to leave the dungeon as soon as I found what I needed.”

The man asked for our mercy and placed his hands in his inventory. Then, he took out pieces of skin taken from famous monsters. “I can even transform into a Lizard or an Ogre…”

I looked at Bae Jaemin, wondering what we should do; he strangely only stared back. It was as if he’d follow my decision.

‘It doesn’t seem like he’s lying…’

However, I was still stuck on the fact that Bang Eunji and Choi Kyung-sik were being chased by assassins after entering the dungeon. Could I trust the man and let him go?

‘What…? Is he acting cute?’

At that moment, Bae Jaemin kept blinking his eyes at me.

Unable to understand his motives, I stared at him; Bae Jaemin sighed quietly and lowered his eyes again. The self-proclaimed Corpse Modiste, who was watching this sight with bated breaths, spoke hesitantly, “E-Excuse me… I think he wants you to check your messages…”

“Huh?”

“Haah…” Bae Jaemin frowned–it seemed like he was saying ‘You and I really don’t match,’ within his mind. Only then did I see and read the notification, [A new message has arrived!].

Awkwardly, I pressed the window; Bae Jaemin’s message unfurled before my eyes.

[**Bae Jaemin**: Torture him for information]

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Lmao, imagine being a captured enemy and telling your captor what his teammate wants from him.

Also, Necromancer doesn’t seem to be the only cruddy class around! Omg, corpse modiste sounds like it has zero combat abilities!

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Chapter 200

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I opened my mouth and stared at Bae Jaemin again. However, the Priest ignored my shock and tapped at the air with his fingertips. Now, he sent his messages openly. The man I was holding rolled his eyes and held his breath due to the rigid tension that fell between me and the Priest.

Before long, the message window blinked with a new notification.

[**Bae Jaemin**: If you don’t like that…]
[**Bae Jaemin**: Then, drag him around.]

‘Honestly, then he should torture that guy. Why is he telling me to do it?’

I loosened my grab on the teary man’s collar. Though I thought Bae Jaemin was correct, I didn’t really want to do as he said.

Released from my grasp, the man faltered and collapsed to the ground. He was muttering through his tears, perhaps realizing that we were letting him live, though unsure of our reasoning. “Hnn… Thank you.”

His pitiful appearance reminded me of when I first met Seo Dawon– when Choi Lee-kyung first visited the [Tower of Command]. His gaunt face exuded the weary, life-hardened scent of a User with an unpopular class…

I felt sorry for him and bent down to give him a hand. When he saw me approaching, he flinched and raised his head. It was then…

“Huh?”

“Jung Garam, what are you doing!”

The air before my eyes shone bright; my vision was obscured. I felt a hot searing pain on my wrist. Something sharp had cut me. Then, I felt Bae Jaemin, immediately after his sharp shout, dragging me from behind. Simultaneously, I felt a hot pain in my eyes.

I had lost my eyesight for a while; in the midst of that chaos, I heard hurried footsteps. I instinctively threw a dagger at the person running away–I didn’t have to think.

“Knghh!”

A few seconds later, I heard a scream and the dull thud of a body falling down. From behind, I felt Bae Jaemin wrapping a hand around my wrist. I tried to shake him off, repulsed, but I felt something warmer than mere body temperature enveloping my wound. The painful sensation quickly subsided.

“[Divine Power].”

“……” I felt embarrassed at the unexpected heal; Bae Jaemin silently focused on taking care of my wound. After gently layering a few more skills, he touched my face very naturally. Of course, I was still wary and held onto his hand.

“Aren’t you unable to see?” He asked.

“……”

Bae Jaemin muttered calmly even though his wrist was bent at an angle from the force of my fingers. Inadvertently chewing on my lips, I let go of his hands.

As cold and soft fingertips brushed over my eyelids, I could smell Bae Jaemin's faint scent as the priest drew closer to me. Did the guy only select famous perfumes? It smelled so familiar.

"Today, you're so…" While treating my eyes with his own hands, Bae Jaemin paused in the middle of speaking. The situation itself made me frustrated and repulsed, so I flared my bloodlust. 'Fuck Off.' Bae Jaemin didn't seem to be intimidated by my vigor, but, sure enough, he stopped talking. The Priest had similarly felt no joy from this aborted conversation.

The pain in my cold eyes vanished in about 1 minute. As soon as the skill finished, Bae Jaemin took his hands off my eyes and stepped back chicly. However, after I blinked to confirm that my eyesight had recovered, the Priest said something quite annoying with his emotionless expression. "Are you in a bad condition today? Your movements stink." [1]

"What?"

"Stay alert. What's wrong with you–how could such a low-grade assassin attack you."

Of course, this had all happened due to my carelessness, but I had no desire to endure the Priest's scoldings. After all, I had dealt with the assassin even while injured. Furthermore, that bastard didn't need to shamefully rub himself all over me. This sort of wound could be treated with a high-grade potion.

How nosy–unloading all this business onto me, telling me to do this or that–how dare he say all this now. I tilted my head and crossed my arms, "Are you whining because you've healed me a little as a Priest? Why are you so condescending after doing your job." [2]

"I'm not being condescending, I'm worried. It seems like no matter what I say, my words press your buttons." [3]

I was sick and tired of the way that Bae Jaemin seemed to imply 'You're the crooked one that's distorting my words.' Could he continue to yap after I shoved this dagger in that pretty mouth?

The Priest continued, “I don’t know why you hate me so much.”

“Hah?”

“You’ve been like that from the very beginning. No matter what I do, you look at me with that unhappy face… Glaring at me with your arms crossed–just like that. Wouldn’t you find it hard to speak kindly in that situation?” With that said, Bae Jaemin hid his tired face between his palms. He looked quite plaintive.

The Bae Jaemin of this era was a handsome man, to say the least; his expression had the power to move people’s hearts. If I weren’t Choi Lee-kyung…the Jung Garam from this time period may have hesitated a little… At least, that’s what I thought.

‘Had this happened to Jung Garam in his past?’

Deep in thought, I looked at Bae Jaemin without any large movements. Suddenly, I wondered if Bae Jaemin had any thoughts of betraying Seo Dawon at this very moment. It must have taken quite a long time to bring all the traitors together and craft a trap…

‘He must have made up his mind–to some extent–already. But he still wants to portray a good image of himself to Garam-ie?’

Worried that the Priest had something else up his sleeves, I opened my mouth to say something…

Clank–!

“What are you two doing?” Accompanied by the sound of metal dragging against the ground, an unexpected figure appeared.

Like a person who had just woken up, the man–Woo Ragi–drowsily stepped towards us, weapon trailing behind him.

I didn’t know when Woo Ragi had drawn near, but I somehow couldn’t erase the suspicion that Bae Jaemin was conscious of Woo Ragi’s presence and put on a performance. The Priest’s sudden conciliatory gesture was still

bothering me. Therefore, I simply stepped back without saying anything more to the traitor.

Perhaps Woo Ragi had actually rushed out after waking up, he shook his head gently, yawning continuously. His chain sword wasn't primed and perched in his grasp and was, instead, drooping like wet insect wings beside him. He looked…less flawless than usual? Eventually, I couldn't overcome my curiosity at his unexpected appearance, so I asked him in a slight astringent tone, "What… brings you here?"

"I wouldn't be here if it weren't for Seo Dawon, that crazy bastard." Woo Ragi murmured a few vulgar curses under his breath. It seemed like the guildmaster did more than send him a few messages.

Before I could finish that thought, a golden chick wearing a round, alarm-clock hat suddenly popped into existence, mid-air, and noisily rang its alarm.

[Wake up! Chirp Chirp! Wake up! Chirp Chirp! Wake up! Chirp Chirp! Wake up!]

Woo Ragi silently grabbed that baby chick and squashed it. Within his hands, the chick soon turned into sand and melted away. "Fucker. Sending this sort of thing every 10 minutes…"

"Ah…"

"I'm already in, you son of a bitch." He jabbed violently at empty air with his hands, as if he were writing an angry message. He was probably swearing at Seo Dawon, demanding that the Mage call off the alarm-chick.

I held back my laughter, recalling how cute the baby alarm-chick was. After exchanging more messages, Woo Ragi scratched his head and placed

his hands on his waist. As soon as he touched his waist, his chain sword glowed with blue light and slowly rose into the air.

“Haah… Fuck.” Though he grumbled, it seemed like he was fully awake now. The man straightened his shoulders, and the sword floated high above his back, ready for battle.

I checked the group chat as Ragi walked ahead; the messages had piled up while I was distracted.

[**Seo Dawon**: The Dungeon’s too large]

[**Seo Dawon**: Who’s the guy that cast Maze, lolol. He’s done damn well–I want to bring him into the guild]

[**Choi Kyung-sik**: We also can’t tell if we’re in the hardcore or normal route… The roads keep changing.]

[**Seo Dawon**: First…Stay where you are, if possible]

[**Choi Kyung-sik**: Yep]

[**Seo Dawon**: Olim-ah, where are you?]

[**Kim Olim**: I’m coming]

[**Kim Olim:** What about Ragi?]

[**Seo Dawon**: I guess he’s still sleeping]

[**Kim Olim:** Do I need to go wake him up?]

[**Seo Dawon:** No, lolol. He’ll wake up soon.]

[**Jo Chanyoung:** I’m almost there]

[**Kim Olim**: Good]

[**Woo Ragi**: …Hey]

[**Woo Ragi**: It’s my day off]

[**Woo Ragi:** Can’t go]

[**Woo Ragi:** I said it’s my off-day, bitch]

[**Woo Ragi:** I barely slept for an hour, fucker]

[**Seo Dawon:** You’ve woken up, dear?]

[**Woo Ragi:** Son of a bitch]

[**Woo Ragi:** I said I’d kill you if you ever send this birdbrain to me, right??]

[**Choi Kyung-sik:** lolololololololololololololol]

[**Seo Dawon:** I’ll send you the coordinates, so, if you have something to say, come on over lolol]

[**Woo Ragi:** bitch]

[**Woo Ragi:** Do you think I’d come?]

[**Woo Ragi:** I can just wait at your house and stab you as soon as you open the door]

[**Bang Eunji:** That’s impossible]

[**Bang Eunji:** I tried to hide in guild master-nim’s house]

[**Bang Eunji:** It was so secure and well-protected; eventually I gave up]

[**Woo Ragi**: ?]

[**Seo Dawon:** Really? You should have told me in advance if you wanted to visit.]

[**Seo Dawon:** I would've left it open…]

[**Bang Eunji:** Ahhh TT_TT It's nice to be invited, but… I wanted to sneak in!!]

[**Woo Ragi:** What kind of bullcrap is this]

[**Woo Ragi:** Fuck, Bang Eunji I told you not to interrupt me while I'm talking, didn't I?]

[**Woo Ragi:** Do you think I'm joking?]

[**Bang Eunji:** ??]

[**Bang Eunji**: Rather, Woo Ragi-ssi shouldn't squeeze in my and Guildmaster-nim's conversation]

[**Choi Kyung-sik:** lolololololololololololololololol]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: I'm going in]

Reading through, it seemed like all the guild members were eventually gathered because the dungeon was just too vast and it was too difficult to find one's way because of the [Maze] skill.

In the end, I shrugged once and followed the two others, who started walking ahead of me. It was unfortunate that I was accompanied by those that made me uncomfortable, but…

'It feels like I'm slowly getting used to this body?'

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Sorry guys~ I'm going to be delayed with the drawing for chap 200 >.< I'm super busy in my work lately TT_TT

Also, RIP for Woo Ragi, but the alarm clock chick sounds adorable. And Bang Eunji's complete ignorant "no u" to him is amazing too.

Footnotes

1. Aka Hamster is being clumsy today
2. In the original, Lee-kyung says "work that puts food on your table." I decided to just shorten that to 'job,' but I kinda enjoyed the sassiness…so here it is in the footnotes!
3. Pressing your buttons means to cause someone's temper to flare

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Chapter 201

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“What’s this?” Woo Ragi, who strode forth in the front of the group, found the body of the assassin I had killed with a dagger earlier. He must have been familiar with the shape of Jung Garam’s weapon, as his gaze was directed exactly at me.

“Uh… He was disguised as a monster; we ran into him.”

“You couldn’t catch him alive?”

I was embarrassed at his immediate follow-up question. After all, I ignored Bae Jaemin, who had been pushing for torture from the very beginning, and released him before killing the man while panicked from his attack. However, Bae Jaemin kept his mouth tightly shut.

I scratched my head and just revealed the truth. “I released him because I thought he was innocent… then, he suddenly started to run away.”

“Is that so?” Fortunately, Woo Ragi accepted my words without digging further. However, he took the time to kick the corpse. I dawdled before recovering the dagger from the assassin’s back; with one shake, I flung the blood off the blade.

Then, when I saw the red blood flowing from the assassin’s back, a strange dissonant feeling washed over me, and I stopped in the middle of my action.

I’ve never killed anyone before, and I’ve never been seriously injured enough to wind up at death’s doorstep… Strangely, my heart felt calm–as if this was just another routine event in my work.

‘Come to think of it, I…utilized the skills incredibly well?’

Considering how I was reacting to unexpected events, I moved unbelievably smoothly. I looked down at my hands for a while. When I saw Woo Ragi stalking forward again, I set aside my uncomfortable feelings.

“[Curtain Call].”

And, as I followed behind the blonde man, I forgot about those dissonant feelings.

Living up to his reputation as Red Lotus’s best DPS, Woo Ragi dealt with the incoming rushing monsters with tremendous skill. I was completely fascinated and mesmerized by his skill.

Woo Ragi’s weapon of choice was an [Echo Blade]. I didn’t know what that sword was made of, but, unlike normal swords, the [Echo Blades] floated around its owner. Like a satellite.

The set of [Echo Blades] consisted of swords of different sizes; the largest of the dozen was almost Woo Ragi’s height. It was used for a wide range of heavy strikes.

The two smallest of his swords–almost the length of one’s forearm–sliced through the persistent and fast-paced enemies rushing in at Woo Ragi’s sides.

In that way, he slaughtered the enemies with four or six moving swords. When the enemy masses became too crowded, though, he often used skills that utilized all the swords he had available.

One of those skills was [Curtain Call].

When Woo Ragi triggered [Curtain Call], the floating swords behind his back came forth and sliced through the gap between Woo Ragi and the

monsters, like lowering stage curtains after a play. The monsters paid no mind to the sword's new movements, though, and gradually sped up, rushing towards him.

Watching from behind, it was like watching moths rushing towards the light. Similar to the fates of those bugs, the monsters exploded in the bright light and crumbled into piles of ashes.

Woo Ragi's face, in the midst of that blue, cruel light and whirling ashes, looked inhumane. So, when Woo Ragi turned back to look at me, with a faint smile on his lips, my heart automatically trembled. "You sure play around when I'm here."

"Uh… Yes?" I said.

"Are here to get carried by me? Are you here to observe?"

"…No, well, it's not like you've given me space to intervene."

"So, that's why you're just watching with your arms folded over your chest?"

"You could've said something."

However, Woo Ragi's angelic dignity disappeared every time he opened his mouth, leaving the image of a frivolous punk behind. His smile earlier was merely bared teeth, belying his irritation.

'He's got no class, no class at all…'

Grumbling, I stepped forward to Woo Ragi's side, dagger in hand.

However, as soon as I stepped beside him, I felt the faint feeling of something gently hugging my back. I barely managed to tamp down a cringe and schooled my expression. Bae Jaemin was silently buffing us from behind. The tactile element to his skills was so unpleasant–it felt like the Priest was holding my hands in prayer.

'Hypocrite…'

While swallowing those thoughts deep inside, I worked diligently to defeat the [De Xin Royal Bodyguards] and [De Xin Military Archers].

Perhaps I leveled up as I defeated them; at some point, the names above their heads turned from orange to green.

‘Or, did that mean the level of difficulty decreased because Woo Ragi joined us?’

It definitely was less stressful than fighting alone. Because Woo Ragi was so flashy and attracted enemy aggro, he was the perfect partner for my assassination skills. With the blonde drawing all attention, I was able to melt into the shadows and stab the monsters from behind.

After hiding in the shadows, I rose up from their ankles and slit the enemy’s necks. At that time, I felt a thrill rising up from deep within me. I felt a sense of freedom that I had never felt before… As if I had found my true calling.

Flushed with those feelings, we began clearing the raid excitedly, when…

“Oho?”

“What is it?”

“…Something’s flying at us from the other side?”

After fighting for a long time, we stepped across countless wooden poles stuck in the pond and slowly headed towards the ship.

However, I could hear the sound of something heavily ripping through the air from somewhere. I was the first to raise my head and turn to look in that direction. Following me, Woo Ragi also frowned his brows; the monsters rushing towards us also stopped rowing their oars and looked back.

“What is that…?” I used my powers of perception in the direction of the strange sound. Now that my vision was enhanced like a telescope, I quickly

glanced through the sky and soon noticed a small white dot flying towards us.

“There’s something quickly approaching us from the 1 o’clock direction… Huh? Is that a monster?” I said.

“Monster?”

“It looks like…hm… a dragon? I think…”

I suppose it’d be more accurate to describe it as a long dragon–from oriental paintings. Startled by the unexpected sight, I almost forgot to speak; the dragon approached us as if it were swimming through the sky.

It was a real dragon–complete with purple glass orbs within its mouth. It was so bizarre to see it flying through the sky, yet simultaneously, the glittering light reflecting off its scales seemed so magical.

Strangely enough, I couldn’t see the monster’s name. Even more alarming, the dragon, which had been flying at a constant speed, suddenly disappeared and reappeared at a far closer distance, as if it were warping.

Threatened, I watched the sky closely and brought the dagger across my chest. However, Woo Ragi reacted unexpectedly; even though the unidentified dragon was closing in on us, he narrowed his eyes, keenly staring at it, before relaxing his expression. “What the–that’s Seo Dawon.”

“What?”

“I guess he met and joined forces with Jo Chanyoung.”

How unbelievable–Startled, I looked back at the sky again; I discovered a previously overlooked black dot, something I couldn’t see because the dragon was too far away before, above the dragon’s head.

As I focused my eye on that black spot, the dot soon turned into a clear silhouette of a man.

Flowing robes with a luxurious glossy luster; a few large, flashy rings adorned his fingers… The man, whose appearance was even flashier than his accessories, was looking our way.

It really was Seo Dawon.

The Mage was carrying a staff taller than he was in his right hand. The black staff looked like a tree root that had just been pulled out of the ground; A golden jewel shaped like a human eye that shone like a star adorned the staff. At that moment, Seo Dawon looked like an evil wizard riding atop a dragon–straight from a fairytale.

“[Gravity].”

The dim sound of him uttering a spell carried on the wind to us; the resulting effects of the spell were bizarre and gruesome.

As if time had stopped, the wind brushing past us stopped; soon, all surrounding noise had vanished. Not just the Immortal Fairies’ music, but also the reverberating sounds of insects that had been chirping around the pond. It was as if everything were holding their breaths.

In the midst of such ominous silence, the moonlit pond lost its shine and darkened, as if it were the void of an abyss. Not long after, the white ship sank into the black pond, as if it were being sucked in.

However, the ship did not sink fully. On the contrary, it slowly began to lift off into the air. The blackened pond began to boil, like heated soup; the droplets slowly began climbing upwards, one at a time.The white boat soon separated itself from the liquid’s surface, and the alcoholic pond began to evaporate.

Atop that rising ship, the Normal Mode boss monster, [De Xin], seemed to be suffocating; struggling, he grasped at his neck. However, no one was able to help him–his loyal men were already ruthlessly smothered till dead, blue from lack of oxygen.

[De Xin] continued to rise into the air. Even higher than the ship. In addition, as the pond began to evaporate and turn upside down, the corpses, that were originally tied to the pillars at the bottom of the pond, began to rise as well.

The corpses surrounded [De Xin] as if they were spectators watching him choke to death. The boss, grasping onto his neck and floundering in silk garments, seemed to be dancing.

[Cough…]

When finally [De Xin] stopped struggling and was simply suspended midair, the dragon, which had been floating in the sky, gently landed. Leaving the reality-bending sight behind, Seo Dawon jumped lightly from the dragon's head.

TL: Hey guys, Still working on so much stuff so I don't have as much time to TL and draw lately. Still, I wanted to give you all a bonus chapter.

Also, I noted that there's something strange going on with Lee-kyung and the way he's getting used to Jung Garam's body~ Weird~

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Chapter 202

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Though the impact of the sight before me was quite incredible, something even more astonishing happened right after.

After Seo Dawon hopped off, sparkling lights began to cover the dragon's body. Soon, its white shine filled my view.

After the light faded, what appeared before us wasn't the huge dragon but Jo Chanyoung in his combat uniform. In addition, the echoes of light still remained, floating as string-like light strands midair. These white strings percolated into Jo Chanyoung's back, as if sucked in, and soon disappeared–It was as if the dragon had turned into a human being.

This was so fascinating because I had never directly seen such transformations before, nor had I ever heard about such cases in my entire career as a User. Jo Chanyoung stretched and crack his neck. After seeing my shocked expression, he made a strange noise.

Only after I felt his gaze did I realize that my shocked expression was perhaps a bit too honest; I turned away from him. Soon, though, I was forced to look straight ahead again because of Seo Dawon close approach.

"Garam-ah," the mage said.

"Yes?"

"Are you hurt?"

The first words I heard from the Mage was surprisingly filled with concern. As if he was genuinely worried, his voice was so soft and gentle.

I felt my face flushing red, and instinctively denied, “N-No…”

“Really? Jaemin-ie said you got injured, though.”

“N-No, that’s… it was nothing.”

“He got hurt, but I healed him.”

I glared at the despicable Bae Jaemin who squeezed into our conversation. No wonder he said nothing to Woo Ragi; he was busy ratting out the tiniest of details to Seo Dawon.

When I glared at him, Bae Jaemin smiled as if he had something to say but eventually frowned his brows and lowered his gaze. It bothered me how shamelessly he could adopt an unfairly wronged expression.

However, Seo Dawon tapped my shoulder and chuckled. “It’s fine as long as you’ve been treated. I just wanted you to be careful.”

“……Yeah.”

“So, stop glaring at Jaemin-ie. You know Jaemin-ie has to regularly report to me about injuries.”

Seo Dawon’s scolding pierced me accurately in my conscience; I reigned in my glare. However, as if I were being stubborn, I stayed at a distance from the Priest.

Subsequently, the Mage passed by me and approached Woo Ragi, who stood unphased. Woo Ragi’s Echo Swords were perched like wings, floating beside him in the air. As Seo Dawon approached, the swordsman created a gap between the blades and allowed him to enter. When Seo Dawon stepped inside, I couldn’t hear any voices from within that cocoon of blades.

‘Maybe they’re talking about something secretive?’

Inadvertently, I began to eagerly observe Seo Dawon and Woo Ragi's expressions. Seo Dawon smiled as he said a few things; Woo Ragi frowned and shook his head, as if he refused to do as he was told.

Because I was so focused on their conversation, I didn't notice the presence that had crept up behind me. Someone tapped me on the back very lightly; horrified, I turned around.

There stood Jo Chanyoung–twice my size even though his posture was stooped over.

However, after going through the trouble of getting my attention, he simply stood still without making eye contact. He stubbornly tilted his gaze away from me; it was to the extent that I would have assumed he was trying to pull a prank if not for his serious expression devoid of smiles.

Furthermore, he must have called out to me because he had some business with me, but he did nothing but silently stand behind me. How frustrating.

"……"

"What…is it?" So, naturally, I had no kind-hearted things to say. At my blunt question, Jo Chanyoung pointed his finger at where the [System Message] alert would be from my perspective.

There, I had received a notification that a new message had arrived. It was as if he was informing me that all he had to say was written in that message.

'But, why isn't he saying anything and only gesturing with his hand…?'

I saw him speak normally during the pre-raid meeting; he shouldn't have an issue with vocal communication…

Even though this business was all so cumbersome, I opened the message with a puzzled mind. Jo Chanyoung had sent a private message–not to the group chat.

[**Jo Chanyoung:** I want to purchase a black-market ticket by tomorrow]

[**Jo Chanyoung:** Also want to know if it's possible to make it a monthly purchase.]

[**Jo Chanyoung:** Can I hand you the amount I paid before?]

I felt even more puzzled when I saw his brief message. Honestly, was it really necessary to do this over text? Furthermore, judging from his behavior and expression, it seems like he was grudgingly participating in this conversation.

I unintentionally responded out loud, "It's possible, but…"

However, as soon as I spoke out loud, Jo Chanyoung rolled his eyes and tapped his fingertips in the air. Soon after, I heard a new alarm, informing me that a [New message has arrived!].

[**Jo Chanyoung**: Rather than talking]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: I want to continue the deal here]

Of course, it was Jo Chanyoung's message that appeared before me.

I was at first skeptical–why, when he has a perfectly intact mouth, would he need to send messages? I wondered if there were any rules to the [Black Market] that I was ignorant of, so I finally asked him these questions over message.

[**Jung Garam**: But, why aren’t we talking out loud…]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: ?]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: Complications can arise when conducting monetary transactions through verbal conversation…]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: You could take the money and not uphold your end of the deal.]

[**Jung Garam**: Me??]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: Yeah]

‘What’s he saying… Does he think I’m the type of person to do that?’

Shocked at the absurdity of his statement, I glared at the summoner. Jo Chanyoung bowed his head a bit more as he noted my worsening mood; he also tilted his body subtly out of my way.

“If you don’t trust me, why would you want to do business with me?” When I immediately questioned him in an angered tone, Bae Jaemin, who had been giving us quick sidelong glances, started staring at me. However, Jo Chanyoung continued to tap at the air with a prim expression even when confronted with my temper.

[**Jo Chanyoung**: Rather than not trusting you, I’ve decided on this method after considering the possible consequences.]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: Also, when I speak with people for a long time, my mood starts to slump…]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: I’d prefer to conduct business with as little speaking as possible.]

His reply–which brokered no formalities nor excuses–was refreshingly curt. After reading all that, I looked at Jo Chanyoung again, but his head had turned away from me and was staring at the ground soullessly.

For some reason, it felt like he'd just trudge away–murmuring 'it can't be helped'–if I were to refuse him for some reason. I was bewildered and not exactly happy with what he said, but I finally nodded. Perhaps Jo Chanyoung's request may become a key component of this [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

However, I didn't know the market price for the [Black Market] tickets; the world within the [Vengeful Ghost Memories] isn't real anyway. This was a quest that had been packaged in with Choi Kyung-sik's 'memory,' so I thought it'd be fine to do him the summoner a favor without receiving money in return. Well… To be honest, I was also curious to see how Jo Chanyoung would react to something like that.

[**Jo Chanyoung**: And the price?]

[**Jung Garam:** I'll just give it to you]

[**Jo Chanyoung**: ?]

I retrieved the [Black Market] ticket by pressing on a button on the [Status Window] and floated it above my hand–as if I were showing it off to Jo Chanyoung. The subtle gleam of the invitation ticket, unchanging from when I last saw it, caught the light; I inserted it into a crevice created by Jo Chanyoung's folded arms.

Jo Chanyoung looked speechless in his own unique way–typical of those that can't express themselves very well–at my unexpected action. When I grinned, his gaze turned chilly, and he grabbed me by the wrist.

“…I hate being in debt.” He firmly shut his open mouth and murmured bleakly. The force applied to my wrist was so great; I felt like I’d be dragged around by him.

However, I was an assassin, a class that was peerless in its close-range attack abilities; Jo Chanyoung was merely a summoner (?)… I simply spread out my fingers one by one, shook them, and laughed teasingly at him.

“If you don’t need it, then you can throw it away,” I said.

“……” The clear bewilderment on Jo Chanyoung’s face made me happy. He blinked a few times, as if he were about to call out to me, and eventually dropped his hand, fiddling with crumpled edges of the ticket.

Just then, a gap appeared in Woo Ragi’s mass of swords; Seo Dawon stepped through and joined the rest of us again, a smile on his lips. Woo Ragi, standing behind the mage, looked annoyed but docilely followed his guild master anyway.

TL: Jo Chanyoung is such an interesting person… I want to meet him. He’s kinda like my friend who’ll text me when I’m in the room w/ her lmao.

Anyway guys, Thanks for reading >.< Hope you enjoyed the two chaps. Trying to pick things up and return to the current timeline lmao.

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Chapter 203

Chapter 203

“The map is loading abnormally because of [Maze].” Seo Dawon led us down the path in front of us.

We followed silently behind him. Ever since Seo Dawon joined us, the monsters haven’t approached–wary of the mage perhaps. Just like how the monsters with green names earlier in the dungeon didn’t dare approach me.

After killing the normal mode boss monster, [De Xin], the sound of the Immortal Fairies’ music was cut off. Therefore, the foggy road felt somewhat gloomy, but the path was devoid of tension. I became at ease, perhaps because I was among the reliable rankers of the [Red Lotus] heydays and was within Jung Garam’s body.

Another way to read this situation, though, was that there were dangerous enemies lurking everywhere who didn’t care about making such competent rankers their opponent, so it was too early to be relieved.

As if he had read my mind, Seo Dawon broke off the long silence, “This skill isn’t controlled by one person; there are at least two people that are moving around and consistently overlapping their skills. Maybe they had even used an item… We probably won’t be able to meet with Kyung-sik-ie by normal methods.

The mage said that he came to this conclusion when, after he broke a hardcore route trap room in half, he exited into a place that he had already destroyed. With that thought in mind, he wanted to convene with the rest of the guild members. Since he was currently out of contact with Eunji or

Kyung-sik, there was a high probability that the two had encountered an enemy.

“So… You’re saying that Bang Eunji or Choi Kyung-sik were defeated?” Woo Ragi responded, with a frown on his face. He looked like he found this whole ordeal troublesome without the slightest hint of concern on his face. I couldn’t find the smallest hint of camaraderie in his question, but Seo Dawon didn’t criticize him at all.

The mage touched the ring on his left index finger and slowly answered, “That’s not it. I think they’re hiding well.”

Now, Woo Ragi walked up to Seo Dawon at the front of the party, presumably to vent his earnest annoyance. “Why do we have to go and rescue them when they’re completely fine, then?”

“It’s difficult for them to exit while Eunji’s protecting Kyung-sik-ie.”

“Is Bang Eunji at a level where she can’t even kill an assassination team that only knows this sort of trickery?”

“Eunji’s skills are enough to kill them and more. However, Eunji’s a sword and not a shield, right?”

“……”

“She’s severely restricted in what she can do since she has to protect Kyung-sik-ie; if this leads to injury, we have no way of knowing how that’ll impact the [Second Company] raid, which isn’t too far off.”

“……”

“The [Second Company] is a gateway we absolutely can’t fail.” Seo Dawon’s tone was mild; he answered Woo Ragi without looking at him. Woo Ragi seemed to be convinced in the end; he no longer continued to argue and just flourished his Echo Blades.

Perhaps he was annoyed with the situation that made him come to work on his day off; Woo Ragi brandished his swords with more violence than

necessary. The blood flung off the blades landed here and there; but, since we were now moving forth peacefully, I didn't want to point that out.

After about 30 minutes of walking, the lake we had destroyed appeared before us again.

"Haah…"

"The same thing again…"

"No… It's different." This time, it was Jo Chanyoung, staring calmly at the ground, who spoke. He covered his nose with his sleeves and looked around at the surroundings cautiously. Then, his face paled, "…We're in a different place. There's a nauseating scent I couldn't smell before. There are different types of monsters here."

Following Jo Chanyoung's words, we snapped back to attention after being so lax. I fixed my grip on my dagger; Woo Ragi went to the front of the party with Echo Blades raised high, as if to protect Seo Dawon.

Seo Dawon briefly recited his [Memorized] spells, and began to activate them one at a time. The golden magic circle beneath his feet began to ripple like waves; simultaneously, Jo Chanyoung shook one of his arms lightly and changed it into a wing.

The orange wings exuded blazing warmth and were clearly not the wings of a bird that existed in reality. In the blink of an eye, Jo Chanyoung's whole body transformed into a phoenix as big as he was; he began to fly over our heads. Bae Jaemin stood still with no particular extra movements, but, seeing as both his hands shone softly, he must have finished his own preparations.

As soon as we finished preparing, the lake peacefully split into two sides as if it were waiting for us. I thought we'd see the corpses tied to the pole, submerged underneath the lake, but…the tragedy waiting underneath the water was even more gruesome than that.

Beneath the lake, there was a nicely built pavilion in the center. Though it was ominous to see a pavilion sunken deep within and nestled in the lake, the beauty sitting on that small pavilion–eyes closed and still–was truly terrifying.

Furthermore, she was hugging the corpse of the normal mode boss monster [De Xin], whom Seo Dawon had killed earlier. It reminded me of common horror movie scenes. It felt as if she'd suddenly rush at us when she opened her eyes; I felt anxious and out of sorts.

Above all… her name, above her head, was colored a deep blood-red.

['Hardcore route' boss monster, 'Daji' has appeared.] [1]

[The hidden side of the Immortal Realm – 'Sweet Banquet' scenario has begun.]

[Daji]'s eyes, which opened alongside the alert we received, were colored a beautifully dangerous red. [2] When I laid my eyes on her, my heart began to beat nervously. Maybe it was the color…it was as if…I was looking into my servants' eyes.

However, Daji didn't move. She slowly stroked [De Xin]'s corpse and began to slowly sing–her voice peerlessly beautiful and chilling compared to the earlier immortal fairies.

[My pitiful king is dead; his body was hung on the castle walls.]

[The victors spoke solemnly.]

['This man made a pond out of alcohol to please his lewd slut.']

['He killed innocent children and made meat from their bodies.']

['It's even said that he held this banquet every day.']

[They said that he's curried Heaven's wrath]

[And that everyone should throw stones at him.]

After each line, the corpses hanging from their wooden poles screamed.

[‘Daji’s’ ‘The most important rule for a lonely soul in purgatory and the Jiangshi’s has been activated.]

Following that, another warning appeared; as soon as that warning manifested, Bae Jaemin called forth a huge shield that covered all of us. Just as the shield spread above our heads, rain slowly fell from the sky. The droplets were as red as blood.

“Soon, the poles will break, and the hanging zombies will group up. Try not to engage them if possible and scatter–after all, they’ll explode as soon as you touch them. Also, organic matter soaked by rain will decay right away; so move according to the shield’s range or keep the rain from directly touching your skin.”

“…Understood.”

“Also, Jaemin-ah. Don’t use consecration( ). That woman isn’t an evil spirit with lingering grudges; holy attacks won’t impact her much.”

“Yes.”

It was my first time coming to this dungeon, but Seo Dawon must have raided this place before. He quickly briefed us on its strategy and stabbed the end of his staff in the floor. “[Chronicle].”

Immediately, strong and cold winds swirled from the staff. The ground foze quickly; his blue ice attack stretched straight towards the pavilion where [Daji] was sitting.

However, though the attack seemed likely to connect with its target, a black Imugi (a mythological serpent) appeared at the pavilion’s entrance and blocked the attack with its torso.

The Imugi was a huge snake–about ten meters in length–and was covered with black scales. It seemed like Seo Dawon knew that would happen; he backed away neatly, but his expression wasn’t too happy.

Woo Ragi clicked his tongue and said, frustrated, “Tch. How is it that the enemy with the highest magic resistance is playing guardian.”

“Mmm… True. It’d be much easier if the Martial Arts Jiangshis [3] would just come out of the lake.”

“Yeah. It does have a poison mist, but it’s not too hard to dodge since it foreshadows that attack with large movements.”

“Can’t be helped. We have to attack at a distance–at least as much as possible.”

Then, after discussing viable tactics, the battle began in earnest.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I kinda love the fact that Daji is the hard mode boss while her emperor husband is the normal route boss. Thematically, it’s so fitting.

Also, I’m about to transport myself into this novel to bop Woo Ragi on the head–he’s so grumpy!!!

Footnotes

1. In history, Daji was De Xin’s favored concubine. She was said to be a ‘fox spirit,’ unrivaled in beauty and cruelty. Using the emperor’s affection for her, she indulged in her curiosity through all manners of torture.
2. The original just says , which could honestly mean like 11 different things. However, that’s probably what the novel is going for. Quick-

witted, beautiful, sharp, important, dangerous… Daji is all those things.

3. Mythological ancient zombies in Chinese and Korean culture.

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[Kyaaaaa!]

The guardian, named [Black Imugi], continued to zone us away so that we couldn’t approach [Daji].

There were times when its tail, the size of a truck, would bend and flick at a tremendous speed, driving itself into our sides. When we jumped into the air and tried to aim for its eyes, it would spray poison mist or open its mouth to bite and tear into our bodies. Its speed was also incredibly fast; it seemed difficult to approach the Imugi without taking any damage in return.

In addition, even if the attacks hit, its scales were so hard that the attacks did not cause any significant damage–only slight bruises and scratches. Because of its strong resistance to magic, the Imugi did not move a single inch in the face of large-scale magic explosions.

‘So, there are times when Seo Dawon is useless too, huh…’

If I were a mage, this battle was so one-sided to the extent that I’d run away.

However, Seo Dawon did not seem particularly anxious and kept using a wide variety of magic that didn’t seem to work. I thought he would have some plan. Seeing the Imugi raise its head–still intact and fine–after Woo Ragi’s echo sword attacks, the inside of my mouth felt strangely gritty.

Of course, I couldn’t just tranquilly watch Seo Dawon cast magic. The bodies that were hanging from the wooden poles stretched their arms straight, turned into a mass of jiangshi [1], and attacked us.

The corpse’s eyes rolled up in their heads; they rushed towards us. Because I’ve experienced this sort of situation before, I wasn’t intimidated; however, the [Jiangshi] emanated a problematic and tricky ‘corpse poison.’ [2]

“My throat and eyes are stinging.”

“Get to Jaemin-ie before it gets worse.”

“……”

The [Jiangshi] would rush in with bodies bloated with alcohol and upturned pupils. However, they weren’t so bloated that they couldn’t properly stretch their arms out; the bodies maintained a neat posture. In addition, their nails were green, as if moldy; whenever they swung their arms, a threatening sound ripped through the air.

I noticed that the [Jiangshi] main weapons were their hands. I tried to cut off their wrist bones while holding the dagger in a reverse grip.

However, as the dagger struck the [Jiangshi’s] wrist, a sound like iron hitting iron rang out; the strike didn’t seem effective. So, I had no choice but to aim for its relatively soft elbow. Even if I cut that off, however, the monster would quickly attach its body together again; I had no choice but to defend myself.

Furthermore, most of Jung Garam’s skills were close combat oriented, so I was unknowingly exposed to the [Jianghi’s] corpse poison.

It wasn’t serious enough for me to succumb to some abnormal status effect, but my condition continued to deteriorate. After hearing my complaints, Seo Dawon told me to go to Bae Jaemin in a kind voice; I felt a little frustrated at that. Even though his words were valid, I felt greatly defiant. However, I wiped all notion of that annoyance from my face and

turned towards Bae Jaemin, following Seo Dawon's orders. I was exposed to poison I could no longer ignore, anyway.

Bae Jaemin stood behind us–in the most protected position–watching the battlefield and casting buffs in anticipation of the guild members' injuries. As I approached, Bae Jaemin turned a nervous look on me; I must have seemed fine at a surface glance, though, for he turned his head away without saying anything.

"Use your cure on me." I said.

"……"

Feeling ignored, I called out to him demandingly. Bae Jaemin simply reached out to me expressionlessly and deployed [Cure].

"……?"

However, as soon as the [Cure] began to take effect, I suddenly felt dizzy–head spinning. Simultaneously, dark red blood poured out of my mouth and nostrils.

As soon as I sensed the abnormal consequences, I immediately wondered if Bae jaemin was finally showing his true colors. So, stumbling, I looked up and glared at Bae Jaemin.

"Jung Garam!" However, the bastard ran to me with a stark, pale face. I raised my dagger up and out, as if to tell him not to touch me, but the bastard did not care and pulled me towards him without hesitation. Then with one hand on my chest and the other on my head, he recited some strange spell. "[Sacrificial Exchange]."

Perhaps due to the current skill's effects, brilliant wings that didn't fit with Bae Jaemin unfurled behind the Priest's back. The flashy wings, which looked like they were formed from curtains of light, flapped a few times before disappearing into pieces.

However, the effect was as amazing as the skill's performative qualities. As soon as the wings disappeared, my pain did as well–as if it had been washed away. My poor condition due to the spreading poison had recovered.

"……What's that?" I couldn't hold in my admiration and muttered sourly.

I could hear Bae Jaemin's chilly voice from above my head. "I've finished so put away that dagger."

As soon as I heard that voice, my momentary embarrassed admiration vanished. Moreover, I felt frustrated with his lukewarm weight leaning against me.

Since Bae Jaemin was only slightly taller than Jung Garam, I could see his philtrum quite close; I wanted to punch him and knock him over. Moreover, the bastard I was angry that I showed him my vulnerable side.

However, before I could hit him, Bae Jaemin suddenly faltered and collapsed. Bewilderment overtook my irritation. "I didn't even hit him yet?"

"…Shut up and get lost." Bae Jaemin pulled himself back on his knees and spat out dark blood; he raised his sweat-laden face my way. He looked how I looked earlier–poison seeping through his body. Eyes bloodshot–veins popping at the edges of his irises–he looked like someone on the verge of death.

Instead of assisting him, I raised his chin up with the dagger I was holding. Then, lowering my voice so the other guild members couldn't hear nor pay attention to what was happening, I said, "What are you scheming?"

"What?"

"What's with the overreaction? [Sacrificial Exchange]? Why did you use such an uncomfortable skill?"

"Haah… If you're going to talk nonsense, then hurry up and get lost."

No matter how much I thought about it, I wondered if it was necessary for Bae Jaemin to act so kindly towards Jung Garam.

Because I believed that Bae Jaemin might have colluded with the assassins who entered this dungeon, the Priest's pale face was nothing more than smoke and mirrors. However, Bae Jaemin continued to stubbornly glare me in the eye; his lips thinned as if he had something to say before pushing away the dagger. "It'll be my responsibility if you die, so don't misunderstand and get lost. Don't come crawling back like a fool because you've gotten poisoned again."

"How many times a day can you use this spell?"

"…Once."

"Then what about the next guild member that succumbs to poison?"

"Haah… Do you think everyone fights like a fool like you? You always take so many risks–this time too…!"

While listening to him, I suddenly cut a line across my palm with the dagger. Though it painfully stung for a moment, the pain soon disappeared. Bae Jaemin flinched before wrinkling his brows.

A faint smell of iron began to exude from where the bastard was grabbing my collar. As expected my wounds transferred onto the Priest.

Bae Jaemin retreated from me with a slightly frightened face, realizing why I had cut myself. I didn't even need to clench my fist and widen the cut; it was clear that I had tide had turned in my favor.

"Will all the wounds I suffer be transferred to you?" I asked, grinning.

Even though looked scared enough to chatter his teeth, Bae Jaemin confessed calmly, "…Only for two hours."

"If I were to get hurt until I'm on the verge of death, will that be transferred to you?"

“Why don’t you try and find out.”

“Should I?” My eyes closed into crescent moon smiles.

Bae Jaemin clenched his trembling fist, trying hard not to show how rattled he was in his expression. “Don’t.”

I carefully looked at Bae Jaemin’s regret-stained expression before poking him in the cheek with my finger. Though the priest looked uncomfortable, he sat perfectly still. Enjoying his humiliation, I asked him in gentler voice, “Jaemin-ah, you need something from me, right?”

“……”

“Honestly, unless you’re a pervert… You must have some ulterior motive to continue to cling close to me–especially when you know how much I hate you.”

“……”

“It’d be much more comfortable for you to just say what you want from me. I might give whatever it is to you.”

Bae Jaemin now looked at me with a contemptuous gaze. However, I saw faint signs of conflict within his eyes.

“Is it because of Beatrice?” I asked.

“……”

Maybe I was wrong; Bae Jaemin repressed his momentarily exposed emotions and lowered his head. “If you’re done talking, get lost.”

Then, a congratulatory notification appeared before me.

Become a Patron!

TL: Really makes you wonder what Jung Garam and Bae Jaemin were like back then O.O

Footnotes

1. Reanimated corpse monsters in Asian lore
2. (si-dok) = virulence or poison that’s released due to decomposing organic matter.

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At this point, Seo Dawon was looking our way; I didn’t particularly want to do so, but I quietly stepped back. Then, I used my skills to deal with the [Jiangshi]s rushing around.

At that time, Seo Dawon, Woo Ragi, and Jo Chanyoung had almost knocked down the guardian, [Black Imugi].

“[Wave].”

No matter how high the [Black Imugi]’s magic resistance was, its scales were only a physical barrier and failed to withstand the shock of the three’s attacks. The guild members avoided the [Jiangshi] and moved to ransack the serpent’s inner organs.

Just like a car crash, a car’s frame may look fine but the insides may be messed up–there were no problems with the outer skin, but the inner viscera had been damaged. Dark, viscous blood began to flow from the Imugi’s mouth. Its long, drooping tongue had begun to hang out of its mouth.

Of course, the [Black Imugi] wasn’t going down peacefully. Now, there was a visible difference in its attack patterns; there was no time to take a step towards the monster because the serpent had sprayed its poison mist everywhere.

However, there were three long-distance damage dealers on our side.

After transforming into a phoenix, Jo Chanyoung couldn’t be touched by poison. He annoyed the Imugi by shooting blessings at it from midair. When the [Black Imugi] tried to attack the floating Jo Chanyoung, Woo Ragi fired his echo blades at it, drawing its aggro yet again.

In the midst of this snail’s pace battle, Seo Dawon began hitting the serpent with his attacks, consistently. Even if a single attack seemed to have no impact, there must be accumulated damage, for the serpent clearly moved to avoid the spells in self-preservation.

Above all–forget avoiding all three attacks–the [Black Imugi] had no choice but to let itself be hit. The [guardian] of a dungeon had no choice but to protect the boss monster from Users. So, while [Daji] sat perfectly postured in her pavilion, the serpent had no choice but to block all attacks directed at her with its body.

At some point, Seo Dawon began to direct his skills towards [Daji]’s location and not the Imugi, and, ever since then, the Imugi had been dragged around by the Mage.

The serpent moved towards Seo Dawon on numerous occasions in order to kill the Mage, but it had no easy access. The guild members surrounded Seo Dawon, keeping the Mage in the center, so no one could approach the Mage while he used his skills. That was why I was also not directly attacking the [Black Imugi].

A Mage was a truly powerful damage dealer, but their slow skills left them vulnerable to attacks. Therefore, protecting Seo Dawon was a priority, and I took care of the [Jiangshi] rushing at the Mage. If Kim Olim were here, this role would have been played by her; however, since she was absent, I had to step forward as a close-combat DPS.

“[Gravity].”

[Kyaaaaaaa–!]

Finally, the Imugi went down with the last attack, slowly collapsing. The system had also notified me with the experience and randomly

distributed items that I had received.

However, we observed [Daji] without relaxing in the wake of victory.

Usually, hardcore boss monsters, after the [guardian] that protected them had been felled, would ‘awaken’ into a more powerful second phase complete with new attack patterns. As expected, [Daji] looked at the fallen [Black Imugi], raised her head, and closed her eyes. Soon after, her white and beautiful skin cracked like rice paddies during a drought.

As he observed [Daji]’s transformation, Seo Dawon briefly began to lead us all. “The [Jiangshi]s will become stronger soon; the corpse in [Daji]’s embrace, [De Xin], will be resurrected soon. [De Xin] will perform a large-scale attack every three minutes. However, if there’s a danger signal, leave its surroundings immediately and try not to jump as much as possible.”

“Understood.”

“Also, don’t make eye contact with [Daji]. According to the scenario, [Daji] was a powerful witch, puppeteering the living and dead alike. Everyone should spread out; do not approach guild members that are acting strangely.”

Listening to his explanation, I looked forward nervously.

As Seo Dawon said, [De Xin] had been resurrected. [De Xin]’s movements were grotesque–as if his body were being pulled by strings–but he was still very fast and powerful.

[De Xin] staggered around and equipped the bow he had stored on his back. Afterwards, he repetitively pulled at empty bow strings. Even if no actual arrows were notched, his attacks still flew towards us.

Reading the airflow, I tilted my head. At that moment, I confirmed out of the corners of my eyes that the attack had cut off some strands of my hair. Tension began to rise throughout my body.

[It was you who called me from the moon.]

[You reached your hand out from the pond and said]

[‘If you tell me your name, I’ll do anything for you.’]

Fascinating despite its insidiousness, [Daji]’s voice reverberated in my ears.

[Daji] sang sweetly and richly–her voice melting honey. A curse was definitely permeating through that song; despite Seo Dawon’s warnings, I kept wanting to turn my head to look at her.

“Bae Jaemin?”

“……”

However, I wasn’t the problem this time; instead, the issue was with Bae Jaemin, who was supporting us from the rear. At some point, the shield that had been protecting us had disappeared. When I looked back, Bae Jaemin had lowered his hands, looking at some strange place with a blank expression.

I didn’t bother checking what Bae Jaemin was looking at and, instead, flew towards him. Even after he was pushed down by my attack, Bae Jaemin continued to blink without much focus.

“What should I do with this bastard?”

“Garam-ah, get away.” Seo Dawon warned me. I was briefly puzzled, but then I thought deeper. I had approached Bae Jaemin even though I was told to stay away from guild members that were acting strangely.

Sheepish, I tried to get away, but Bae Jaemin had already placed his hands on my eyes. “[I shall block the enemy’s view].”

As soon as the Priest placed the debuff on me, my vision became dark for a while; soon after, all the guild members around me began to look like [Jiangshi]. Even where Seo Dawon had stood just a minute ago, a [Jiangshi] was spreading out its blue hands towards me. My head was spinning.

“Dawon-hyung?” I asked.

[Growl…]

I couldn’t even hear the guild members’ voices; all I could sense was a mass of flesh walking towards me. However, I backed away while lowering my dagger. If I swung my dagger in this situation, I would most likely harm the other guild members.

Fortunately, my [Confused] condition didn’t last long; my perception returned to normal.

The problem, though, was that in that short time, Bae Jaemin walked away from our range of control towards [Daji], moving as if he were being controlled–just like [De Xin].

I knew that I would be attacked if I were to approach the Priest, so I stood there, helpless. I directed a question to Seo Dawon, who had arrived by my side in the blink of an eye. “What should we do about that basta–Bae Jaemin?”

“…For now, it’s better to observe him. [Daji] wants to use him as her slave; she won’t kill him.”

Fortunately, our situation didn’t seem too dire yet. Furthermore, Seo Dawon must have expected something like this to happen; the Mage ordered Jo Chanyoung to lure [De Xin] away from the Priest.

Watching that, I complained, “Honestly, why did he look at her when told not to…”

“It’s hard to resist [Daji] when you first come to this dungeon. Those of the holy attribute are especially weak to her…” [1] He looked over at Bae

Jaemin as if he were a naive child.

When I saw Seo Dawon's worried gaze rest on Bae Jaemin, my mood worsened quickly, and my brows frowned. However, before I could express my feelings, Woo Ragi approached us with light jumps; his expression was far more menacing than mine. "Is he possessed too? Kim Olim also flipped out on me."

"[Daji] is particularly discordant with those with holy-attributes. It can't be helped–their natures just don't match."

"What are you going to do? If you make a large-scale attack, Bae Jaemin will set up a shield."

I almost blurted out that we should do that, but, fortunately, I drawed upon superhuman patience just before I opened my mouth. While I was silent, Seo Dawon stared blatantly at Woo Ragi.

"What's with those eyes? What are you going to make me do now…" Worried for himself, Woo Ragi backed down–quite unlike his usual bluster. Seo Dawon, though, caught his arm before the swordsman could move away.

Disgusted, Woo Ragi tried to shake the Mage off, but, once again, Seo Dawon was faster. "Ragi-yah."

"What."

"I'm afraid I need your help." Then, before Woo Ragi could react, Seo Dawon shouted "[Warp]."

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: RIP Woo Ragi.

Also, Lee-kyung's speech patterns, at this point, have completely transformed into Garam's speech patterns. I tried to show that, but I'm not too sure how successful I was!

Footnotes

1. (jui-yak) is literally rat poison. It's slang for critical weakness.

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In the blink of an eye, Woo Ragi was transported right in front of [Daji]. Seo Dawon used his [Warp] to send the swordsman to the boss monster's vicinity.

Because he was far away, it was hard to hear exactly what Woo Ragi was shouting, but my ears caught the faint sound of curses. Seo Dawon, the one who sent Woo Ragi into harm's way, simply smiled and took no further action.

"…Will he be alright?" I asked.

"Who knows?" After the Mage responded ambiguously, he turned from [Daji] to stare at [De Xin].

I also turned to stare where Seo Dawon was looking, but, strangely, [De Xin]'s movements had changed somehow. Until earlier, he focused on attracting our attention with his brutal attacks, but now staggered around in a circle before taking faltering steps towards [Daji].

"Since [De Xin] is a puppet controlled by [Daji], she can't easily hold and control her doll now that an enemy is right in front of her." Seo Dawon, observing this scene, calmly continued to speak. Simultaneously, the gem embedded in his staff began to heat up, scattering brilliant light–more light than before.

"[Thunder Calling]." Seo Dawon shouted the magic keywords and drew a long horizontal line of light with the staff in front of him. The line soon

wrapped around [De Xin]’s body, which was moving in choppy jerks as if the puppet was broken; the glowing light soon exploded. Dozens of lightning struck the ground where he stood, as if to demolish the area.

Furthermore, at that moment, Woo Ragi hit Bae Jaemin in the back of the head and knocked him out. He then dragged the Priest into the [Thunder Calling]’s trajectory. I wondered if he would be worried about being caught in the falling lightning strikes, but his echo swords pointed straight into the sky, letting the current flow through them. The swords served as lightning rods.

Even in this situation, [Daji] couldn’t get close to the dying [De Xin]. Moreover, Bae Jaemin, who she had enslaved, had been stolen in an instant; face filled with anger, she turned towards Seo Dawon.

Because of the unusual bloodthirst pouring forth, I instinctively stood in front of the Mage.

[Grrrrrrrr….]

A bird’s feet talons grabbed [Daji]’s forehead. A great force must have been exerted–I could see the claws digging into her forehead skin.

While [Daji] was distracted, Jo Chanyoung attacked her from behind. Following this initial attack, he grabbed her right shoulder with the other foot and flapped his large wings. White smoke began to curl up from the contact points; soon, his whole body began to catch on fire.

In pain, [Daji] violently grabbed the bird’s ankle with her hand, but she quickly removed her grasp after a sizzling sound. Perhaps due to a phoenix’s nature, Jo Chanyoung’s entire body must have been made of fire.

[Arghhhh–!]

Afterwards, [Daji] struggled and resisted, but nothing worked. Eventually, she was quickly dragged far above ground; soon, her ashes rained down.

[You've defeated the 'Hard Core' route boss monster, 'Daji (Hardcore).']

Alongside the notification, the lightning strikes that seemed to tear through the sky calmed down; Jo Chanyoung descended onto the ground and returned to his normal human form.

And Woo Ragi, who survived the [Thunder Calling] through his echo swords turned lightning rods, stepped out of his sword cocoon and grabbed Seo Dawon by the collar. Of course, Seo Dawon didn't seem to care. With a sincere voice, the Mage said "I believed in you," and earned Woo Ragi's ire.

"Huh…? Why am I here…" At that time, Bae Jaemin, who had been lying on the ground, also returned to his senses. After hearing an explanation, he seemed very ashamed to have been defeated by [Daji]; the priest flushed red, all the way down to his neck, and bowed his head. I didn't even say anything, but, as soon as Bae Jaemin met my gaze, he frowned and turned away.

I didn't think much of Bae Jaemin's sensitivity, but, after seeing his upset expression, I felt like I had properly observed how he felt pitiful. He had rolled around on the ground during [Thunder Calling], soiling his clothes… was that enough to hurt his pride?

"Looking good."

"……"

I mumbled, loud enough for the Priest to hear. Judging by how the Priest's back recoiled, Bae Jaemin must be sensitive about his looks. Moreover, he even turned around to glare at me this time.

I glared back, not breaking eye contact, daring him to fight with me. Seo Dawon, whose collar had been grabbed this entire time, suddenly broke free from Woo Ragi's hands and pointed someplace with his finger. "The road's open."

Following Seo Dawon's gaze, we looked at the destroyed pavilion; just as he said, there was a small entrance underneath the pavilion that seemed to lead to some basement. 'Like usual,' I lead the pack towards the entrance. Then, using skills, I observed the surroundings. "I don't think it's trapped."

"You don't know where it leads?"

"Yes… Maybe because space is twisted? Was there always a road here?"

"Ordinarily, this is the way to the exit." After contemplating for a while, hyung turned back to me, "There's no choice. Can you go in first and mark the road on the map? We'll follow afterwards."

"Yes."

"Okay. Be careful."

After receiving my hyung's farewells, I grabbed the ladder that led down to the basement, descending one rung at a time. Honestly, if someone hadn't bothered me, I could have jumped straight down.

Bae Jaemin had attacked me verbally once again, "Is it okay for Jung Garam to go alone?"

"What?"

"He's clumsy and takes risks… I'll go with him."

Of course I jumped up and said I hated that. How could I trust him to come along with me? I recalled how he'd killed me in the past…

'…Huh, what's that? Why would I die?'

Soon, contrasting memories emerged; my head suddenly felt blank. Nausea rose up within me.

The problem, though, was that my timing was off–my strong protests were cut off.

“Fine. Then the two of you go.”

“Huh? Ah–don’t want that!”

“I’m a little worried to send you alone on such a twisted map. If you go with Jaemin-ie, you’re less likely to be hurt.”

“Ah, hyung! I really don’t want that. I’d rather go alone.”

Dawon had already adopted a smooth smile–his expression conveyed his staunch resistance against anything I’d say. I’ve never beaten an argument when hyung adopted that face, so, in the end, I accepted my defeat and sighed.

Hyung clearly knew how much I hated Bae Jaemin, but he had never accepted my opinions in the dungeon. Even if I grumbled openly about how it would be better to deal with ten [Daji]s simultaneously rather than to move with that pretentious lump, hyung still stared at me without backing down.

Eventually, I was the one to step down. I glared at Bae Jaemin, who dutifully insisted on following me, without hiding my annoyance. I had also resolved inside to kick him in the back and push him into a trap.

However, facing my blazing eyes head on, Bae Jaemin simply looked at me with a strangely calm demeanor. In the end, I had to descend down with the annoying Bae Jaemin on my tail.

The ladder leading down to the basement was really endless. We descended so far that no light from the opening of the entrance could eventually be seen.

Honestly, if I were alone, I could let go of the ladder and quickly crash to the bottom instead of dealing with this long ordeal. That would be far faster. However, since Bae Jaemin wouldn't be able to keep up with that kind of performance, such actions were impossible. Of course, this fact also played a role in my irritation.

"Hey, since when have you cared about me enough to make a fuss about following me?"

"……"

"Just what are you up to?" In the end, I couldn't endure so I took sarcastic potshots at the Priest. Bae Jaemin said nothing even after hearing my insults. However, it was a little difficult to assume that he was ignoring me; he stopped in his tracks and clung to the ladder.

"Your way of speaking… It's truly like Jung Garam," He mumbled, strangely. The underground passage was far too quiet–I couldn't have misheard him.

After thinking for a long while, I frowned and asked, "What bullshit are you saying now?"

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Hamchii!!! You've lost yourself~

I'll try and see if I can do something to turbo TL this next week. We'll see if I have time~ and if I want to procrastinate as much.

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Chapter 207

Chapter 207

“You still don’t realize? Don’t you know why you’ve come ‘here’?” Bae Jaemin said.

“What?”

“Is this an effect of being buried within the memory?” Bae Jaemin did not pay any heed to my nervous reaction and chatted to himself willfully. I felt a growing headache building behind my eyes and eventually took my hands off the ladder rungs and fell down.

Perhaps the drop was shallower than I thought; I was able to step on the firm ground quickly. The issue, though, was that Bae Jaemin also leapt after hearing me land. The bastard’s face was hidden in the dark, but his looming, approaching presence was clearer than a thunderclap.

“…What kind of unpleasant things are you mumbling to yourself?” I said, as I quietly reached out a dagger in his direction. I resolved to slash at him if he got any closer.

At that moment, the thought that the bastard was my guild member flashed through my brain, but my instincts were warning me. I knew I had to finish him before he said anything else.

However, I was half a beat slow yet again. Bae Jaemin leaned towards me, as if he were about to rush in, but, as soon as I opened my eyes wide to observe the man’s movements, he stopped in his tracks and burst out a [Light]. While my view was temporarily blocked by the sudden light, he

moved out of sight and rushed at me without hesitation. In my anxiety, I had been caught in a rudimentary trap.

However, contrary to my expectations, my body felt no pain; rather, a soft hand embraced my face. At first I thought the bastard was aiming for my eyes, but he wasted his sole chance to aim for my fatal vital points. He simply cupped my face with both hands.

Without missing a beat, I penetrated his personal space and placed a dagger by his Adam's apple. The situation was now reversed–I was now threatening Bae Jaemin.

However, the bastard paid no heed to his cut and bleeding throat. Instead, when I stepped inside his embrace, he opened his arms wider and looked down at me with eyes as deep as the bottom of a well.

I felt some dissonance from the moment my eyes locked with Bae Jaemin's. Simultaneously, I realized that something didn't make sense. "No way."

"……"

'This isn't Bae Jaemin….'

When I first looked into Bae Jaemin's eyes, I didn' feel anything out of the ordinary…but, somehow, I couldn't tear my gaze away from those ordinary eyes.

As if pulled by some invisible gravitational pull, I stared endlessly at the black darkness lurking behind his eyes. There was some strange magic laden in his gaze–as if I could see a swirling river right before my eyes.

It was different from when I had locked gazes with Bae Jaemin before. A deeper, richer emotion–more so than anything else I've ever felt–was within him. My impression of this man before and after I met his eyes was so different. It was to the point where I found it hard to know why I mistook this man for Bae Jaemin a while ago.

Only then was I sure that the person in front of me wasn’t really Bae Jaemin but someone wearing his skin as a shell.

Unfortunately, before I could steel my expression, I flinched; the mysterious man standing before me perceived what I had just realized. Nevertheless, the man hugged me more confidently without trying to hide or floundering.

This situation drove me crazy; I was too nervous to force strength into the hand holding a dagger, so I tried to weakly push him away. But, the man simply pulled me deeper into his embrace, and I had no choice but to stand around, wondering what my next move should be.

The man bowed his head towards me, ignoring my anxiety. Moreover, as if he were teasing me, his lips came close enough to almost touch mine; I stopped breathing…

Then, continuing onto my ears, he whispered in a low tone, “I came here to wake you up, [Lee-kyung-ah].”

And I… I foolishly kept my eyes closed until the man said my name. Then, after he called my name, I heard the sound of a window shattering from far away; this place slowly began to crumble and collapse.

* * *

Dizzied, I let go of my dagger. The released dagger melted into the ground and disappeared.

Normally, this would be an alarming occurrence, but, right now, none of that mattered. After all, everything here was fake. The dagger that had melted into nonexistence wasn’t a problem; this body–this ‘Jung Garam’–was also a falsehood. My body had already turned back into my original identity: ‘Choi Lee-kyung.”

Though when I returned to my original body, I strangely felt an incomprehensible pain all over my body. I couldn't remain alert because my whole body felt so bruised as if I had been beaten all over; there was a strange chill deep within my bones. Dry heaves rose up from within automatically. "Ughh…"

Of course, I had nothing to vomit inside my stomach. Even though the disgusting scent of food wafted up to my nose, only saliva poured out of my mouth.

I could still vividly taste the hamburger I ate with Choi Kyung-sik, but I hadn't actually eaten anything. My stomach–which had nothing to eat–was wrung and squeezed, but there was nothing but drool.

At that moment, someone's soft hands touched the side of my mouth without hesitation. That person supported me, clutching at my faltering body. Holding my dizzy forehead, I looked at the person that still looked like 'Bae Jaemin.'

"Seo Dawon?" I asked.

"Yeah. Lee-kyung-ah."

When what I had assumed was confirmed, my head began to hurt more than my body ached.

How did Seo Dawon adopt Bae Jaemin's appearance and come inside this [Vengeful Ghost Memory]? Moreover, he chose to look like Bae Jaemin–the enemy he hated the most?

I looked at the repulsive face, staring hard at the only familiar aspect–the red eyes–and asked, "H-How did you come here?"

"I devised a method because you wouldn't wake for such a long time."

"What? How long did I sleep?"

"Today's the third day."

Indeed, this amount of time would definitely worry Seo Dawon. Even so, something itched at my senses. I tried to repeat to myself that my life is simply just a critical variable in his plans… That's all…

However, I couldn't stay immersed in such sweet emotions for a long time. So, I buried all that I wanted to say and bowed my head to apologize. "S-Sorry… That's…At a certain point, I thought I should behave perfectly like Jung Garam…"

"……"

"It didn't feel like it'd be prudent to get caught… So, I actually remember why I came to this dungeon, but I have no memories ever since I came in…"

"…It would have been hard for you to resist. This is a well-made trap." After remaining briefly silent, Seo Dawon comforted me.

However, to my embarrassment, his comforting words made me more upset. In fact, I barely heard his reprimand because of the few seconds of silence before his comforting words–that silence weighed down on my mind.

'I can't even do something like this…What on earth would he think?'

Not being able to act reliably as a 'master,'–the sense of shame that came with the inability to judge and act as the [Red Lotus] guild members do despite our (admittedly brief) correspondence–weighed heavily on me now more than ever. Though it was fake, the memories of being able to move and act like Jung Garam also made me feel more bitter. How should I put this… I felt a severe sense of deprivation.

'Seo Dawon must be really tired of this, right? If it weren't for his situation, he would never have signed a contract with me…'

But, as soon as I thought that, Seo Dawon suddenly grabbed my chin and lifted it up. Surprised, I looked at him; Seo Dawon looked down into my eyes carefully. "What were you thinking?"

“Huh? I-I wasn’t thinking about anything…”

“But why do you look like you’re about to cry? Do you still feel nauseous?”

“No, it’s not that…” I fumbled and made excuses, but Seo Dawon still held my face in his hand. The longer this confrontation continued, the more my heart began to beat. Although it wasn’t Seo Dawon’s face in front of me, I started to feel nervous and oddly guilty.

At that moment, Seo Dawon spoke bluntly, as if he had read my inner thoughts. “You haven’t failed yet, so don’t be so melancholy.”

“Re… Really?”

“Yeah. It’s not over yet. I just came in early because I was worried.”

“Seriously? Haah… What a relief.”

I smiled when I heard that my ordeal hadn’t ended in complete failure. Seo Dawon looked at me and took one step closer; he looked as though he were about to do something, but immediately retreated again after doing nothing.

So, I looked at him curiously; when the Mage and I made eye contact, he simply shrugged his shoulders. “I can’t even ‘cheer you up’ with this body.”

“Huh? What?”

“Lee-kyung-ie likes it when I do ‘this and that’ to him, right?”

“W-What are you talking about!”

He implied that if he were in his original body, he would have done ‘something.’ Furthermore, his expression was so mysterious; I ended up yelling at him.

Become a Patron!

TL: I…wanna see Seo Dawon cheer Lee-kyung up, even if this isn't his original body.

Also!! Dawon!! I missed you!

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Chapter 208

Chapter 208

Seo Dawon and I walked through the endlessly long passage. The only light in the passage was Seo Dawon's summoned [Light], so I had almost fallen over several times on the unpaved bumpiness of the path. Whenever that happened, though, Seo Dawon caught me.

Even now I could remember being 'Jung Garam,' and I was dissatisfied with my clumsy body… But, I couldn't even complain in front of Seo Dawon, who had adopted Bae Jaemin's appearance.

"Do you need something?"

"Huh? No?"

"Then why all the sidelong glances?"

"Ah, that's not it…"

"Of course you'll stumble if you keep glancing elsewhere." Scolding, Seo Dawon stretched his hand out towards me. I hesitated briefly, but I grabbed his hand because I thought it would be a better alternative to falling over.

As I walked slowly, led by a hand that was thinner than the Mage's original hand, my view gradually brightened. When it became bright enough for us to identify each other's faces, Seo Dawon turned off the [Light] and began to look around cautiously.

“Where are we….” I murmured.

“……”

When we entered the illuminated space, I was honestly quite bewildered.

Strong iron tables, neatly arranged flasks, old computers, and stacks of documents–this looked like a flawless laboratory. Seo Dawon had his mouth firmly shut while looking around; there wasn’t much to say about it.

“Choi Kyung-sik…ssi? Excuse me… Is there anyone there?”

“Hmm.”

Nothing happened even after we waited for quite a while; I had no choice but to raise my voice and call out for Choi Kyung-sik. I even lightly tapped the iron tables with my fists. However, nothing happened–only echoes resonated within this empty space.

While I called for Choi Kyung-sik, Seo Dawon rifled through some of the documents piled upon the iron tables. Nothing must have grabbed his attention, though, as he quickly placed the pages down again.

‘Huh?’

It was then.

As I snuck glances at Seo Dawon, who was reading the documents, I noticed across the room from where we entered. The iron gates were painted white like the walls of the laboratory, so, at first glance, it wasn’t so noticeable. However, when I saw a slight gap, that gate looked like the way in and out of this room.

“Dawon-ah, the door behind you…”

“Door?”

“Argh! W-What’s that–just now!” I attempted to inform Seo Dawon about the door, but… I made eye contact with someone through the open gap.

Goosebumps rose all over my skin.

Those eyes disappeared as soon as I screamed, but I was certain that someone was peeping on us from behind that door. After seeing my pale complexion, Seo Dawon fearlessly kicked the door I was pointing at. Of course, though, no one was there.

Behind the iron gate, there was a staircase, and I could clearly hear faint footsteps running away. Seo Dawon, who had been half doubtful that something was there, closed his mouth and looked back towards me after hearing that sound. “Did you see what they looked like?”

“No… I just made eye contact with him.”

“Was it Choi Kyung-sik?”

“……I don’t know.” Though I didn’t get a clear look, I didn’t think that the unidentified person was Choi Kyung-sik. Though I was startled to meet the eyes of a hidden person….

… ‘I think I’ve seen those eyes before…’

It was difficult to explain, but those pupils felt familiar. Even though I matched the names and faces of those I knew to what I saw, I couldn’t quite recall who I saw. I felt frustrated–as if a fog had been clouding my head.

‘I think I’ll know straight away if I just saw them one more time…’

Anyway, there was no hint of finding more about the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] if we were to stay here, so, even if it was dangerous, we decided to chase the stranger that ran down the basement stairs of the laboratory.

Before going down the stairs, Seo Dawon pressed the switch next to the door. It must have been a light switch–fortunately, the bottom of the stairs was clearly revealed.

Click–!

Furthermore, the space wasn't so deep, contrary to what I expected. How should I say this… It looked just like a small warehouse used by the laboratory upstairs. Though stacked up, the delivery box piles were shorter than I was; when we flicked the switch within the warehouse, everything was washed with light.

This was advantageous for us who had come to this place to find the suspicious person that hid behind the door. Even now there were signs of someone moving in a hurry; so we slowly moved behind the rustling delivery boxes, preparing for a sudden attack.

Seo Dawon, who walked in front of me, seemed to find the intruder first. "Choi Lee-kyung?"

"Hm?"

"……"

However, after calling my name, Seo Dawon simply paused and did not approach the intruder any further. It felt quite different from his usual bold behavior–like he was somehow bewildered.

"What? What's wrong?" I said.

"……" Even after a long while passed, Seo Dawon said nothing. I couldn't help but to stick my head out from behind his back to check on what he had seen. My mouth fell wide open from the shock of the intruder's identity. "What the… W-Why am I over there?"

"……"

How horrifying… A man that looked exactly like me was staring back at us in fear.

That wasn't all. He wasn't alone; a small skeleton bravely stood, arms wide open, in front of the man, trying to protect him.

"I-Isn't that Lackey?"

“…Are you… Choi Kyung-sik?” The trembling ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ seemed to have taken some courage after I recognized Lackey and tossed us a question. I listened absentmindedly to his voice and stared at the man who wore my face.

Then, instinctively, I pulled Seo Dawon to my side and shouted, “That’s a fake!”

‘Choi Lee-kyung’ made a dumbfounded expression before glaring at me, “Who are you calling fake! You should stop pretending after wearing my face, Choi Kyung-sik.”

“What? Why am I Choi Kyung-sik?”

“Stop acting weird. I’ve come here to sign a contract with you–not to see you imitating me,” ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ retorted, made a cheeky expression, and drew Lackey closer into his embrace. It was as if he was saying ‘You don’t even have a Lackey of your own.’

Speechless, I looked at Lackey within his arms. The skeleton gave us confused looks before deciding that the closest man must be his master; it began making threatening clacking sounds at me.

I was unable to calm down–I felt such a sense of betrayal at that moment. Tearing up, I found myself angry at that despicable fake. “Y-You coward… even creating a Lackey…”

“What are you talking about… Lackey’s been with me ever since I came here.”

“Lackey never enters [Vengeful Ghost Memories] okay?”

“Then, how come you’re claiming you’re the real one when you’re the one roaming with Bae Jaemin?”

The fake ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ was strangely overly talkative and aggressive. I was going to say that Bae Jaemin was actually Seo Dawon,

who had simply taken the Priest's form, but the Mage stretched out his arm and stopped me. I was unable to bring that point up.

As if recovering from his brief moment of confusion, Seo Dawon spoke to Choi Lee-kyung with a calm voice. "I'm not Bae Jaemin."

"……?"

"I borrowed his body as a shell to enter this [Vengeful Ghost Memory]." As he said that, Seo Dawon lightly manifested his trademark, his golden magic circle, over his palm before scattering it.

Then, 'Choi Lee-kyung' crumpled his brows, as if he were contemplating the Mage's words. He looked so familiar to me when he was lost in thought; I continuously inwardly repeated to myself 'That's not me…'

However, soon after, 'Choi Lee-kyung' raised his head and stared blatantly at 'Bae Jaemin'; it was odd to see his expression slowly change.

At first 'Choi Lee-kyung' looked at him with distrust, but the fake soon opened his mouth slowly and blinked his eyes… It felt like my reaction, when I realized the Mage's identity, had been copy-pasted onto the man before me.

The unpleasantness of seeing someone copy me was becoming gradually unbearable. 'Choi Lee-kyung' suddenly stepped forward, "A-Are you Seo Dawon?"

"……That's right."

"How did you…"

Now, it felt like I had become a total third-wheel. [1] Seo Dawon was answering without hesitation, not even suspicious of that fake…

I folded my arms and glared at the fake. When I saw Seo Dawon staring at 'Choi Lee-kyung' with downcast eyes, something painful was caught in

my throat.

Become a Patron!

TL: Part 1 of Bonus chapter! Turbo to the end of the arc (by the end of this week) we go~

Ngl, this is my worst nightmare–If I saw a doppelganger of myself…I probably would have an existential crisis.

Footnotes

1. The original is =bridesmaid. The meaning is the same as third-wheel though. I chose to be more localized than literal.

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Chapter 209

Chapter 209

However, that fake ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ went one step further and finally crossed a line. That bastard looked as if Seo Dawon, who appeared before him, was some great savior and jumped casually into the mage’s arms, hugging him. “Whoa! I mean, this is… I’ve been wandering around here for so long and I’m overcome with happiness to see you…”

“……”

The fake ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ didn’t stop there–he suddenly stepped backwards, made a fuss, and flapped at his now flushed neck. In addition, Lackey simply stared, with its fingers in its mouth, at its master’s shameful behavior. If that was the real Lackey, the skeleton would already have squeezed in, clacking furiously, between me and the Mage.

I snorted and glared at ‘Choi Lee-kyung.’

‘Unbelievable. If you’re going to imitate me, then you should do it properly…’

I’ve never acted like that towards Seo Dawon. So, I thought Seo Dawon would soon push away that ‘Choi Lee-kyung.’

However, Seo Dawon simply stared at him without any further movement; at that, ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ sighed, relaxing a little, and grabbed the Mage by the arm. I wasn’t the only one startled at such natural skin contact. Seo Dawon’s back became rigid, as if he was nervous; he began looking down at ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ as if he were something fascinating.

“As soon as I arrived, I was in an empty space–no one came out. I was relieved, though, that at least Lackey could be summoned…”

“You didn’t meet any monsters?”

“Yeah… There was nothing? And Choi Kyung-sik…never appeared either.” ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ gave me a sidelong glance as he mentioned the Alchemist’s name. That passing gaze was filled with wariness and discomfort…an exact replica of my expression towards him.

I met that gaze, unwilling to back down, before looking at Seo Dawon a little anxiously. It was frustrating to see Seo Dawon be so motionless within that fake ‘Choi Lee-kyung’s’ grasp; I was uncomfortable with the idea that the Mage had perhaps already made his choice.

Above all, to see someone in this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] adopt my face and pant all over Seo Dawon like that… It hurt my pride. Though I held affection for the Mage, I’ve never openly appealed to Seo Dawon like that.

‘Why… Is he writhing his body like that?’

Do I really act like that?

I wanted to grab Seo Dawon by the collar and ask him, ‘Do I act like that in front of you?’ but… I couldn’t. In the end, I glared at ‘Choi Lee-kyung,’ clenching my fists within my folded arms.

However, whatever ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ thought of my inaction, he soon turned to Seo Dawon after staring me down. He now clung to the mage completely, as if he were dangling off of Seo Dawon’s arms.

What made me furious was that Seo Dawon not only did not push the fake away, but still looked down at him wordlessly. Frustrated, I wanted to scream, ‘Isn’t making others intimidated with just a piercing stare your specialty?’ It felt like my anger was boiling within me, threatening to burst out.

“Haah. But I’m glad you’re here. Actually, I was worried that I’d be stuck here. Furthermore, suddenly… someone who looked exactly like me barged in. I’ve never seen an enemy like that, so I had no idea how to respond…” ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ said.

“……”

The fake grinned as if he were incredibly relieved. And Seo Dawon paid close attention to that bastard, without tearing his eyes away from the fake’s face.

I felt so anxious as Seo Dawon stared at ‘Choi Lee-kyung.’ His hesitation was so different from how he usually acted. No way…is he really confusing me with that fake?

“Lee-kyung-ah.” However, after a few seconds of silence, Seo Dawon turned towards me and called my name. Simultaneously, ‘Choi Lee-kyung’s expression turned dark. It was clear at that moment who the Mage chose.

After being so shaken for these past minutes, my anxiety disappeared all at once at the Mage’s call. I took one step closer to Seo Dawon, answering him joyfully, “Yep!”

“We must be inside some mirror-like thing right now.”

“Inside a mirror?”

“You look exactly the same…” Seo Dawon glanced at my right hand. “You’re right handed.”

“Huh? Yeah…”

As soon as I answered, ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ looked down, flustered, at his hands from behind the Mage. Then, in that state, the bastard slowly became transparent. ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ opened his mouth, as if to say something, but soon melted completely into thin air and vanished. It appeared like the monster was defeated once it was caught.

I stared blankly at the place where ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ had futilely disappeared. “How did you know?”

“When he held onto me, he reached out with his left hand first. Something was unnatural.”

However, Seo Dawon’s response was a bit questionable.

While ruminating on that discomfort, I mumbled to myself, “…Is the only difference between me and him our dominant hand?”

“What?” Seo Dawon didn’t ignore my murmurs and questioned it immediately.

I hesitated before eventually answering him in a grumpy tone, “Wasn’t there a lot of differences…between me and that ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ earlier? But you only kept on looking at him…Like you couldn’t tell…”

My voice rose a little at the end of my sentences, as if I were whining, ‘Why couldn’t you recognize me?’… Honestly, I was deeply upset by that, so I wasn’t able to control my emotions.

However, as soon as he listened to my words, Seo Dawon’s lips quirked up. Teasing, he said, “Ah, of course I knew about your differences from the very beginning.”

“Then, why…”

“He looks exactly like you. I couldn’t exactly lay hands on him.”

“……”

I was struck speechless; Seo Dawon turned and locked gazes with me casually. He didn’t say anything particularly ridiculous, but I strangely felt hot. It’s not like was fishing for those flirtatious comments either…

However, I soon returned to my senses and responded sarcastically, “…Don’t say things you don’t mean.”

“He was smiling so brightly with your face–what could I do?”

“……”

However, Seo Dawon paid no heed to my sarcasm. His posture was relaxed; he seemed to be trying his hardest to make me feel fidgety and flustered with his words.

His words always gave me food for thought. Even when he didn’t truly like me. So, even if my heart pounded, I was angry; I wanted to refute what he said and make jokes. Something like ‘Ah, so you’re saying my smiling expression doesn’t look too good, is that it?’ I barely held those comments in.

I snorted, to tell him I could hardly believe him, and walked ahead while ignoring the Mage. However, the previous scene kept repeating in my head. Could Seo Dawon really prefer that fake–someone who adopted such silly expressions and wore his emotions on his sleeves? Or, could he be dissatisfied with the ‘me’ that never smiles so happily?

It wasn’t so easy for me to smile in front of Seo Dawon. How many people could laugh nonchalantly while trying to defend their minds–to build defenses against rushing affection? Moreover, we’re in a special relationship, and he treats me affectionately. Currently, I had to build walls on my side of the relationship so as to not cross a line–smiling was impossible.

Once again, Seo Dawon casually broke through the walls I built. He approached me without breaking eye contact and said, “You like my smiling face too.”

I looked at him in surprise, quickly turning my head as if I was burned by fire; I regretted that action immediately after meeting the Mage’s gaze. He was staring at me, as if he were engraving my expressions one by one inside his head. It even had the illusory effect of being sucked into his eyes–like he had access to all my thoughts.

Seo Dawon knew I have affections for him and am attracted to him. And, right now he's probably… Wouldn't he be extra sure that I still liked him?

[Clack Clack?]

"W-Whoa!"

"…Why hasn't that one vanished?"

At that moment, if Lackey hadn't squeezed its head between the gap between mine and the Mage's legs… I might have inadvertently asked Seo Dawon the question that had been blazing within my mind.

So, after my startled heart calmed down, I felt rather relieved. And, heedless of my mood, the Mage lifted Lackey lightly, dangling it in the air, and began having a staring match with the skeleton.

Become a Patron!

TL: Self-defeating emotions at it again T_T I understand what Lee-kyung's feeling, but I definitely think that, in these moments, we can see that Seo Dawon definitely does feel *something* for Lee-kyung. But both of them definitely have their own issues and have trouble communicating and knowing what each other needs. That'll be addressed somewhat #soon though.

Also, Dawon's comment about being uable to hurt LK's lookalike reminded me of the intruder Dawon in Woo Ragi's memory. It's interesting…and totally a glimpse of how the Mage could become that *person/monster*

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Chapter 210

Chapter 210

However, Lackey was strangely docile. If it were the real Lackey, it would have bared its teeth as soon as Seo Dawon touched its body.

If I were to compare try and humanize the skeleton… I suppose it seemed more absent-minded than usual. Seeing its attitude, I definitely felt that the skeleton before me was a distinct ‘fake,’ separate from the original Lackey. However, when I saw it struggling with its hands reaching out towards me in a way that was similar to my precious servant, I felt some pity for the fake skeleton.

However, Seo Dawon coldly said, “We’ll probably need to destroy this.”

“Ah…Really? Can’t we just leave it?”

“Normally, these kinds of copies disappear automatically when discovered.”

“Uh….”

“However, this one’s still left behind.”

“Mmm… But, I’m saying this because I truly don’t know, but… If we just leave it…would that be dangerous?”

“I don’t know yet. However, this isn’t a normal situation. It’s better to eliminate sources of anxiety.”

I didn’t want to particularly harm the fake skeleton, but, because Seo Dawon had such a strong opinion, I stopped trying to hold Lackey’s outstretched hand. In this situation, Seo Dawon’s judgment would be better than mine, anyway… Though my heart was uncomfortable, it couldn’t be helped if the fake could possibly be dangerous.

However, when I held Lackey to ready it for disposal, I felt a certain presence behind us.

[It’s been a long time, guildmaster-nim]

There, behind us, was Choi Kyung-sik smiling at both of us with his hands in his gown’s pockets.

After Choi Kyungsik’s ambiguous greeting–was he truly welcoming or was he sarcastic?–Seo Dawon’s appearance began to change slowly. That is to say…he returned to his original form, shedding Bae Jaemin’s appearance.

Flippantly looking down at his body, Seo Dawon crossed his arms and adopted a placid expression rather than noting his physical change. He then asked Choi Kyung-sik, “Did you do all this to reject the contract?”

His question was incredibly straightforward. In addition, combined with his domineering expression, the Mage sounded like he was about to start a quarrel. However, Choi Kyung-sik faced Seo Dawon, smiled good-naturedly, and shook his head.

[Of course not. I definitely must sign that contract.]

“Then why have you dragged us along, taking your sweet time?”

[Haah. I’m sorry for that. I didn’t do that on purpose… I’ve lost track of time while exploring Choi Lee-kyung-ssi’s subconsciousness.]

“……”

At the sudden mention of my name, I opened my eyes wide and looked between the two guild members. However, before I could fully understand

their conversation, the Mage's body gradually became transparent. Startled, I rushed to his side.

However, for some reason, it was impossible to get within a meter radius of Seo Dawon. Just earlier we were close enough to hold hands, but now I couldn't resist this illusory force field.

I reflexively looked at Choi Kyung-sik; he met my gaze and shrugged his shoulders.

[It's incredibly nice to see him after so long, but… Guildmaster-nim is, at any rate, an uninvited guest here.]

"You… to Choi Lee-kyung…" Seo Dawon muttered.

[We'll be there soon after this conversation is finished, so there's no need to tremble with anxiety.]

Close to fully transparent now, Seo Dawon opened his mouth and said something, but I couldn't fully hear what he said. Then, he was soon disconnected from this space.

After casually kicking Seo Dawon out of this 'memory,' Choi Kyung-sik took large strides to stand before me. Peering at me with shiny eyes from above his eyeglass frames, he looked at me as if he were observing something fascinating.

The Alchemist felt different from his cheery self from within the [Vengeful Ghost Memory]; tense with anxiety, I moved into a withdrawn posture. Smiling, Choi Kyung-sik continued to ask questions to my wary self.

[Actually, I'm a little skeptical of this contract. I'm unsure you'll be able to endure and continue to proceed through these sorts of [Vengeful Ghost Memories] in the future.]

"……"

[You already look like you're at your limits with mine… What are you getting out of this contract? If you continue like this, you'll become an existence that's neither dead nor alive.]

I could hardly understand what the Alchemist was saying, so I had no choice but to blink my eyes and continue to listen.

'I'm reaching my limits? And what does he mean by an existence that's neither dead nor alive?'

Choi Kyung-sik seemed to have noticed my confusion.

[It seems like you weren't making informed decisions.]

"What… I don't understand what you're saying…"

[You've never thought about it?… How experiencing a dead person's memories might affect you?]

Choi Kyung-sik's words were like a sword piercing through my lungs.

However, though I was embarrassed by what he said, I immediately protested. Various thoughts–various excuses–piped up in my brain.

'Why shouldn't I experience the memories of the deceased? Am I behaving weirdly? Even though I've been hurt before, I've never once failed in signing the contract…'

Those excuses were probably why I could answer so quickly, even though, in reality, my thoughts were all jumbled up. "I-I've… never felt any discomfort. And, if something was wrong with me, Seo Dawon would take some sort of countermeasures…"

[So, it'll be okay because guildmaster-nim is protecting you?]

However, Choi Kyung-sik threw back my words at me in an innocent tone.

[Do you really think that?]

“……”

[Do you think that the guildmaster-nim would have been ignorant all this while?]

“That’s…”

[If Guildmaster-nim knew and yet kept silent because it’s ‘not important for you to know’…]

“……”

[Wouldn’t you feel betrayed?]

Is this what it feels like to be suffocated? I stumbled like a fatally injured person; Choi Kyung-sik dragged me into his embrace as if to support me. However, before I could lean on him, he reached out both hands, pushing at my chest until I stood in place.

“…I don’t know why you would say that. Choi Kyung-sik-ssi… don’t you want to be revived, more than anyone else?” I tried to speak calmly, looking at his cold expression without avoiding his gaze. Choi Kyung-sik looked at me as if he were looking at a mysterious puzzle and slowly loosened the hold he had on my arm.

[Of course I want that. However, it’s unfortunate that you’re my only option.]

“……”

[This may sound harsh, but after we complete the contract, you and I will be in the same boat…]

“…..”

[I’m simply pointing this out because I’d rather not board a sinking ship. I have no personal feelings or grudges with you.]

After speaking, Choi Kyung-sik smiled; his eyes seemed to really convey that he was feeling no particularly salient emotions.

It was only then I got a glimpse of what kind of person Choi Kyung-sik was. Being able to get along with everyone–laugh with everyone–didn't mean that he was actually close to those people. He was a man who always moved through life with a suitable mask–a smile on his lips–and maintained clear boundaries.

And, according to Choi Kyung-sik's judgement, I was… a precarious person that may collapse at any moment.

So, I clenched my teeth and said, "Even if I were to become a lunatic… Seo Dawon would probably have expected that outcome. Then, he'll search for another method on his own. Also, I haven't fallen into madness yet."

[……]

"More than anything, whether or not I'll remain sane or go insane, you've already boarded this boat's deck."

[……]

"You're the one who doesn't have a choice–not me. I already have four servants; you're merely an option for me." I was careful not to cry, but, fortunately, I had no need to be so cautious. I felt like my temper was cooling rather than rising.

Choi Kyung-sik blinked at me a few times and then stroked his chin with a politely melancholic smile.

[I apologize, Choi Lee-kyung-ssi. It's been a long time since I died, so I think my words are coming out rather aggressively.]

"……"

[However, I think I'm still a good 'option,' so let's proceed with the contract. If you're no longer angry at me, that is.]

He apologized very gently; both he and I knew it wasn’t a sincere apology.

However, I was in a position where I needed to accept his apology; the Alchemist bowed to me, as if he’d march along to my beat. Once again I clenched my teeth and manifested the [Vengeful Ghost Contract].

TL: Thank you to ‘Put some Suga in my Tae’ for the kofi! I’m turbo-tl’ing anyway, but have a bonus chapter!

Also, Choi Kyung-sik is an interesting character. You’ll see more of him in the coming days, (and soon, without the tint of defensiveness hamchi has here). I’ll explain why I like him within the Red Lotus group in the coming chapters 😀
Though, big oof, these two are not off to a great start.

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Chapter 211

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Choi Kyung-sik observed me placidly; lips drawn in a thin line, I left my signature on the illusory parchment.

Finally, when Choi Kyung-sik finished signing, I felt a sharp pain on my back as if I were being seared with a branding iron. The contract seal must have been engraved on my back this time.

Although I tried not to show my discomfort, Choi Kyung-sik smiled faintly at my frown.

[You exaggerate [1] quite a lot, Lee-kyung-ssi.]

"……"

[Ah, will I garner your hate for saying something like that? Mm… Then, your body must be quite sensitive.]

"It sounded like harassment both times."

[Really? I didn't really mean anything by my words.]

Choi Kyung-sik smiled with a gentle expression. That smile was so soft; I felt like such a strange man for getting upset at him.

I'd probably be at odds with this man in the future–just as I thought that, Choi Kyung-sik slowly approached me. He looked down at me and spoke with a congenial expression.

[Choi Lee-kyung-ssi really seems like the type to like Guildmaster-nim.]

"…What are you talking about, all of a sudden."

[Should I say you're transparent… To put it nicely, you're innocently genuine.]

I frowned at his words and glared at him. However, unlike before, Choi Kyung-sik quietly spoke with a serious expression.

[When you access my memories with the 'Vengeful Ghost Memory,' I can see deep into you as well.]

"……"

[What you currently crave, your current situation–I can see all that. When you sign a contract with me, you can see my status window, right? Servants have access to similar functions before signing the contract.]

"……"

[That's why I'm saying all this. I can see all of Choi Lee-kyung-ssi's emotions.]

I was a little shocked to hear that the servants could see my feelings like I had with the [Vengeful Ghost Memories]. Then, soon after, I felt severely uncomfortable. This must be why Choi Kyung-sik found me such a pushover.

However, I had no way to express all this, so I simply stood while staring at the ground. I wanted to ask if he still had access to my feelings, but I endured that desire with superhuman patience. However, Choi Kyung-sik ended this conversation with another question.

[As expected, it seems like this is new information to you?]

Brief silence settled around both of us. However, the [Vengeful Ghost Contract] looked as if it would soon be completed, signalling its end as the interdimensional space slowly dissolved around us. I began sinking into the light.

Because of that, I missed the timing to answer the Alchemist. In reality, I had no energy to properly respond to him. If Choi Kyung-sik intended to sow distrust between me and Seo Dawon…he unfortunately succeeded. I closed my eyes–it felt like I was falling into an endless void.

[Replay of the deceased, 'Choi Kyung-sik's,' memory has ended.]

* * *

'Ah…'

Soon afterwards, I opened my incredibly weighty eyelids at the feeling of something pressing down on me.

At first, I thought that weighty feeling was from how gloomy I felt after that uncomfortable conversation with Choi Kyung-sik ended badly, but, when my vision cleared, Lackey's white and round skull came into view. Judging by the pain in my compressed chest, it seemed like the skeleton had been curled up on me for a long while.

"Lackey-yah…" A rough and hoarse voice came out of my mouth, as if, for three days, I hadn't drunk a drop of water. I inadvertently closed my mouth. Lackey raised his head as soon as he heard my voice and soon came to my side, tilting its head–the skeleton didn't have ears though, so how did it hear me?

When I looked into the red light that originated from Lackey's empty eye sockets, my heart felt strangely calm. It felt like I was back home after a long and arduous trip–like I had just passed the threshold with my big suitcase. Though my body was tired, I felt such comfort from the skeleton that my heart felt relieved.

Pushing down my teary emotions, I patted and touched its cut head with a weakened hand… At first, Lackey opened its mouth gradually as I rubbed him; after a minute, it loudly clacked and hugged my face with the full extent of its power. I even felt the skeleton's thin arms trembling.

"You were worried, huh… Haah. Sorry…"

[Clack clack clack clack!!]

If Lackey had tear ducts, it would have cried waterfalls by now–that was how intense its reaction was. Seo Dawon had said in the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] that I hadn't opened my eyes for 3 days. The skeleton's reaction was probably due to that.

However, as I hugged the Lackey that recklessly rubbed itself into my embrace, I was shocked after looking down at my body. "Seriously… What on earth is this?"

Jung Garam had once revealed his weird tastes while replacing my bed… What a maniac who would put chains at the head of the bed–I had forbidden the assassin from stepping foot in my room, saying those cuffs would never be used.

But…

My body under the blanket was stark naked, and my ankles were locked in chains. The very chains connected to the bed.

Shocked, I stared blankly down at it before suddenly raising my torso. I barely had any strength left since I had been laying down for so long, but I was overcome by the desire to get myself out of this situation.

However, the door suddenly opened at the chain's rattling noises; my bare chest was exposed to Seo Dawon, who suddenly barged in.

"……"

"……"

Seo Dawon was holding something that looked like a towel in his hands. Similarly wide eyes met mine; the Mage reached out and closed the door while still staring at me. I assumed the other servants were in the hallway–by closing the door, their view had been naturally blocked.

As soon as the Mage entered the room, Lackey raised its head and tried to crawl up my body, resembling a tempestuous cat with its fur raised all

over. Because of that, the blanket, which was ambiguously perched around my hips, was dragged down; I had no choice but to hurriedly hold the edges of the blanket and remain in vague danger of exposing myself.

That was to say… In short, I was embarrassed enough to want to die.

"How's your body feeling?" The Mage asked.

"…A-Alright."

Fortunately, Seo Dawon casually passed over this embarrassing situation.

While I responded, I returned back under covers and laid down. I felt heat flush through my reddened face, and there was no way I could lower the blankets that I had pulled back up over my torso. Since I was naked, my actions were inevitable.

The problem, though, was that Lackey hadn't given up on trying to bury itself into my embrace. The skeleton dragged down the blankets I had worked so hard to gather and clung onto my hips.

Simultaneously, Seo Dawon approached my side of the bed, and my body was in clear view; my arms trembled as it expended effort to grab the blankets the skeleton had stolen, somehow. Fortunately, Seo Dawon pretended not to notice anything, even as I succeeded in pulling up the blanket once again.

"That's a relief. Rest well today, and, later, you should eat the potions that Kyung-sik-ie makes."

"Ah, mhmm…"

"You're not in pain or uncomfortable?"

"No…"

Expressionless, the Mage rearranged some of the bangs that had been glued to my forehead with sweat. I flinched at his touch; when my ankle bent a little, the chain touched my big toe.

“Then, rest.” Seo Dawon said.

“Ah! B-But… Excuse me… Why is something like this tied to my ankle?” I asked hastily.

Seo Dawon, who was about to leave, looked down at me. Then, in lieu of answering, he gently placed his palm on my forehead.

At first, I thought he was measuring my temperature, but he had only briefly placed his palm on my forehead before he began to stroke my head a few times. Then, as if he were explaining to a child, Seo Dawon explained. “I said that you’ve been asleep for 3 days, right?”

“Huh? Ah… Yeah.”

“Sometimes, you’d walk around while asleep. I tied you to the bed because I thought it’d be dangerous if I weren’t there.”

“What? Really?”

“You weren’t tied up at first, but… you kept getting injured.” With that said, Seo Dawon deliberately pressed lightly on my ankle underneath the blanket.

I immediately felt a throbbing pain, as if he pressed on a bruise. When I flinched in shock, Seo Dawon looked at me with an incomprehensible gleam and placidly said, “I washed you everyday, but, everytime I washed you, I saw a new bruise I hadn’t seen before–it bothered me.”

“……What?”

The mage said something so shocking, quite casually, and smiled with his eyes when he saw my rigid self. “I’m joking. To think you’d get so surprised…”

However, contrary to his claims, he continued to knead at my legs.

Become a Patron!

TL: So… What a doozy of a chapter. Should I…put a yandere tag on Novel Updates or something?

EDIT: Sorry, I forgot to add this last night. I'm looking for a proofreader/editor. If you have any interest, DM me on Discord!

Footnotes

1. is more like exaggerating one's reactions to pain. For example, screaming when you anticipate something painful like a vaccine shot.

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Chapter 212

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Like a beast bitten on the back of its neck, I couldn't move; my body froze. I felt an incredible pressure from Seo Dawon–like the Mage would immediately do something if I were to move.

Click–

"Choi Lee-kyung. You've finally returned?" Fortunately, someone confidently entered the room at that time–Kim Olim. She entered the room while holding a white gown, perhaps for me to wear once I woke up.

However, despite the timely appearance, a strange vibe that couldn't be hidden filled the space. Kim Olim looked around the room, the silence flowing through the room's interior, and looked alternately between me laying on the bed and Seo Dawon sitting next to me.

The Paladin squinted, "It's been a short while since Choi Lee-kyung returned to consciousness; for you to do such **things**…"

Then, pretending to be ignorant of the strange atmosphere, Kim Olim threw a straight punch at us. My face flushed; I wanted to explain myself.

However, Seo Dawon's calm answer was faster. "What were you imagining, Olim-ah? Please be self-conscious of your supposed holy nature."

"I don't think you have the right to say that while fumbling at Choi Lee-kyung's groin over the blanket."

“G-Groin?! It’s just my knee!” I shouted.

I was collateral damage in her attack against the guild leader, yet again. Looking back, though, it might have looked like that from Kim Olim’s angle…

Anyway, I wanted to appeal to her that we were never in that situation, so I protested by lifting my legs from under the blanket–as if I was kicking the air.

However, Kim Olim did not back down and said, in a chilly voice, “It’s also strange for him to touch your knees, Necromancer. Normally, two men don’t touch each other’s legs while in that position, while in bed. This is just common sense.”

“I was simply explaining to him about the injuries he incurred over the past three days.”

“In addition, Seo Dawon has no doctor’s license. In the future, it’d be better to consult with me about wounds or pain.” As Kim Olim finished, she looked only at me, completely ignoring the Mage’s words. I couldn’t stand the shame and bowed my head. Of course, Seo Dawon, the person that caused all this pandemonium, was still lightly touching my hair.

Angry at Seo Dawon’s disregard, Kim Olim threw the gown that she held–hard enough that I could hear it whipping through the air… The thrown gown stopped right before the Mage’s nose and fell gently.

Seo Dawon folded the gown, placed it on my chest, and finally rose from his seat. Silently, I raised one hand and brought the gown under the blankets.

[Clack Cla-Clack!]

Under the covers, Lackey began biting at the gown. I didn’t intend to give it to the skeleton, but it seemed like Lackey wanted to play around.

When I saw its actions, the reality of the situation fell on me; I sighed deeply. Kim Olim and Seo Dawon looked at me before exiting the room and closing the door.

* * *

After wearing the prepared gown, I carefully observed the chain tied to my ankle. It was easy enough to resolve the knot on my own, and I was able to leave the bedroom. As soon as I opened the door, five pairs of eyes looked at me with a burdensome gaze from the living room.

“Uh… Mm. I-It’s been a long while…” I said.

“Choi Lee-kyung…”

Among them, Jung Garam, lying down on the sofa, was frowning the most. The young Assassin stared at me with a troubled expression; he stood up and immediately approached me. I was intimidated–it seemed like he was rushing over to hit me…

“I heard you were in my body?”

“Huh? Ah…Yeah.”

After I said that, Jung Garam blatantly checked me out. Then, with a slight anticipatory look, he asked, “How was it?”

“How…was what?”

“My body!”

I had no idea what to say, so I peered over Jung Garam’s shoulder at Choi Kyung-sik, who looked as if he were witness to some stranger’s business. Choi Kyung-sik smiled brightly when we locked eyes. It was nothing much, but his relaxed expression made my temper rise.

‘Look at him, acting like he’s all that…’

I bit my lower lip and turned towards Jung Garam. “Well… whether your body or mine, my mind was a mess there…”

Though I tried to respond calmly because I couldn’t admit what I truly felt, Jung Garam gave me an unimpressed look. “Geez, honestly… So, you didn’t like it?”

“Ah, no. That’s not what I meant…”

“You’re really amazing, you know. How could you have such a hard time while using my body?”

“R-Right…”

“I was so excited to hear that you had transformed into me…”

“Huh?” When I nodded submissively, Jung Garam said nothing more–as if the tense energy had cooled down… Still, it looked like the young Assassin still had more to say; he stared blatantly at me. A rare moment of nervous hesitance–as if he were about to reveal something he truly had on his mind.

Jung Garam unexpectedly scratched his cheek before asking, “But… Why did you choose my body for the [Memory]?”

“What?”

“There’s plenty of servants to choose from–there must be a reason to choose mine?”

I was bewildered–this was such a topic change from the fact that I floundered through the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] with ‘Jung Garam’s’ body. When I opened my eyes, I just happened to find myself in Jung Garam’s identity; it wasn’t like I chose him specifically. “I didn’t really choose…”

“Choi Lee-kyung didn’t make a conscious choice, so he won’t be able to answer you properly even if you ask.” It was none other than Choi Kyung-

sik who intercepted this awkward question and responded. The Alchemist looked at us while adjusting his eyeglass higher on the bridge of his nose with his finger.

I wanted to protest, but I simply bit my lips because it was true that I had little idea of how the [Vengeful Ghost Memories] worked.

Upon hearing that, Jung Garam muttered to himself, “It’s subconscious?” and immediately grinned at me. “Hnn, really?”

“……”

His gaze was quite meaningful, but I simply turned my gaze away–too intimidated to ask further. I made eye contact with the Mage, he pointed next to him, as if he were waiting for this moment. I immediately approached the Mage to avoid Jung Garam’s sparkling eyes.

Then, Woo Ragi, who was sitting on his other side, looked at my approaching self and clicked his tongue. “How does this guy get more fragile as time goes on? He’d die from a good hit.”

“……..” Every word coming out of his mouth was utterly rude, but… I decided to think optimistically and assume that was the Swordsman’s brand of worrying for others.

“Ngh…” However, as soon as my butt touched the sofa, I was startled at the tingle that ran through me–the muscles throughout my entire body wanted to scream.

‘What is this, all of a sudden?’

While I was lying in bed earlier I didn’t feel anything strange, but right now my back felt so stiff–as if my hips would begin to break away.

“Choi Lee-kyung, you look like you’re in a lot of pain,” Kim Olim said.

“Huh? Ah–no. It’s just a sudden muscle ache…”

“It’s not muscle ache, but damage obtained within the [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. Although Seo Dawon sutured you up urgently…neither he nor I am good at healing.”

“……”

After stating that, Kim Olim placed her hand on my pale back. I’d been helped by her in this way before, but somehow, this time, I just got more and more nauseous. I didn’t feel any better.

She observed me for a while before sighing and taking her hands off of me; she then reached out to Choi Kyung-sik, who had been watching us. As if he had been waiting for this moment, the Alchemist placed his hands inside a midair pocket and took out a golden flask. “Would you prefer only drinking one bottle a day?” His tone was like a pharmacist explaining prescribed drugs at the pharmacy.

Kim Olim accepted Choi Kyung-sik’s explanation and immediately came to me with the flask. “That’s what he said. Choi Lee-kyung, drink this for now.”

“Huh? What’s this?”

“It’s a recovery potion made by Choi Kyung-sik. In your case, this won’t help all that much, but… Anyway, even if it’s weak, it’ll still help.” She handed me the bottle with an immovably stern look, so, eventually, I accepted the potion.

Even as I drank it all–mouth wide open–the golden liquid flowing through the bottle still made me uncomfortable. Choi Kyung-sik disliked me; was it prudent to drink some unidentified liquid from someone who despised me?

However, Kim Olim’s attitude was so firm that I was forced to swallow the sweet liquid that filled my mouth. Belatedly, I noticed that this liquid must have contained some alcohol.

‘They said it was a cure, though…?’ My mouth was too busy with drinking to speak, so I could only roll my eyes around questioningly.

Choi Kyung-sik shrugged when he saw my expression and said, “Ah, are you perhaps unable to handle alcohol? However, in Lee-kyung-ssi’s case, I thought its numbing effects would be helpful since he’s so sensitive.”

“…….”

“If you’re uncomfortable, I’ll leave out the alcohol next time.” His chic response did not betray any other underlying thoughts, so I eventually pressed down on my discomfort and drank the honey-flavored soju-like potion.

Seo Dawon watched quietly beside me; as soon as I took my last sip, he asked, “How do you feel?”

“I don’t feel any different?”

However, a few minutes later, the throbbing pain definitely subsided in intensity.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I adore 1 Assassin, and that’s Jung Garam being absolutely adorable. Look at how excited he is when he thought Choi Lee-kyung subconsciously liked his body the best >///<

Also, I’m reminded of how unreliable a narrator Hamster is when I read this chapter–he’s a very real person imo. When he thinks someone dislikes him,

he continues to think that way. Otherwise, there’s little sign that Choi Kyung-sik is being particularly mean to him here~
I sympathise tbh.

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After a little more time passed, my exhaustion faded. It was as if I opened my eyes, waking up refreshed after a good night’s sleep.

[**Fatigue Recovery Drink – Gold**]

Type: Recovery Potion
Durability: 10
Use Level Restriction: None
Special Skill: Fatigue recovery (S)

Description:

A Fatigue Recovery Potion made by the Alchemist, ‘Choi Kyung-sik.’

Made through the combination of high-quality ingredients that would draw a king’s envy and ire, such as mermaid horns, in exquisite balance. This potion will quickly stabilize the body and mind of any modern User.

However, its cost is incredibly expensive.

Caution: Take care to only consume one bottle a day.
Taking the potion in bulk may drain one’s account balance.]

After drinking the potion and checking the status window, I had gotten a notification that I had obtained a new item alongside the item's description.

I examined the potion's description and suddenly became curious about its price. Honestly–the warning to only take one bottle a day wasn't due to possible addictive qualities or any other side effects?

"You feel better now, right?"

"Well…"

When Choi Kyung-sik met my eyes, he grinned and asked how the potion did. Though I didn't know how much it cost, I nodded for now because my aching body felt fine. The servants who perceived that my condition was now better, took their watchful eyes off me one by one.

"So, now that Kyung-sik-ie joined…" After a short silence, Seo Dawon continued, "If Kyung-sik was successfully summoned, I had an idea to speed up our current sluggish situation. I wanted to talk about that."

After saying that, Seo Dawon looked at the servants sitting around the room. I hadn't heard anything about this, so I was confused…but most of the others didn't even change their expressions, clearly understanding what Seo Dawon was referring to.

Even Choi Kyung-sik, who had just been summoned, nodded. "You're referring to the dummy?"

"That's right."

"Hm. Something like a dummy isn't so difficult to use, even now, but…"

As I listened carefully to their back and forth conversation, I looked towards Seo Dawon. The Mage looked like he was going to say something more to the Alchemist, but he focused on me instead. "What's up?"

"…What's a dummy?"

"Ah. So… It's like a doll–a fake body."

A fake body? I couldn’t get a sense of what it was even after his explanation; Seo Dawon also had a contemplative expression on his face, like he was trying to find the right words to explain this concept.

At that moment, Choi Kyung-sik naturally intervened and took over the explanation, as if this were his field of expertise. “In our current Vengeful Ghost states, we’re severely restricted if Choi Lee-kyung-ssi doesn’t summon us. This, you already know, right?”

“Yes?”

“Mm. Would you be flustered if I bluntly described it as a ‘limitation’? In any case, that’s exactly how it is. The foremost limitation on the servants is that we must flock, all together, according to Choi Lee-kyung-ssi’s movements. I suppose I’m quite free for a dead person. But, I have to stay within a certain distance from you, other people won’t notice nor acknowledge us. If the necessity to draw the opponent’s attention arises, we have no choice but to be summoned.”

“Ah…”

I nodded, acknowledging all that; in that regard, I was aware of the various inconveniences the servants experienced to some extent.

After seeing my expression, Choi Kyung-sik continued his calm explanation. “So, in order to overcome the constraints on servant movement, we’re considering creating an item called a dummy–a temporary ‘body replacement’ object. Though an Alchemist cannot create living beings, with proper ingredients they can at least make something that moves.”

For example, like a golem. Choi Kyung-sik tapped on the floor, ready to show us a demonstration. White lines began drawing itself on the normal living room floor; something akin to the Mage’s magic circle was created in a blink of an eye.

Placing his hand in his inventory and rummaging around, Choi Kyung-sik took out and threw down a fist-sized sparkling gem on the shining lines.

The gem did not clatter and roll about on the living room floor and instead was swallowed, like a pebble thrown into a pond.

Then, the white lines shined red; after a few minutes, what seemed to be a lumpy cotton pillow gradually rose out of the ground. The cotton pillow-like thing was tied up with string and was quite large–almost 170 centimeters in length. It stood, balanced, reminding me of scarecrows hanging in a rice field.

Within a few seconds of being summoned, it began to shake even though nothing touched its body, jumping in place. Startled, I stood still as I watched the scene unfold before me.

"This is the dummy's basic form. An advantage to using the dummy is that it keeps its structure until it is completely destroyed. It doesn't need any additional ingredients nor mana. In our discussion, we were trying to figure out how to get past limitations on our movement by 'possessing' this item with a bit of effort on our part."

However, as soon as Choi Kyung-sik finished speaking, Jung Garam, whose cheeks were inflated with air like a pufferfish, raised his hand and said, "I'm definitely against it." [1]

Accompanying his resolute tone, Jung Garam's brows were heavily furrowed as the young Assassin glared at the standing lump of cotton. He really looked like he detested it. And the reason why he so loathed that thing was…

"How could you ask me to possess something so ugly?"

…was because of the dummy's appearance.

Of course, the cotton lump didn't resemble a human being at all; even if it were to be possessed and made mobile, there were still many limitations. And, like Jung Garam's biggest complaint, it looked a little grotesque.

The face of the dummy looked like it had been poorly drawn by a child with crayon–[' _ '] scribbled onto the cotton head… If I were Garam-ie, I don't

think I’d like to go into that doll either.

However, at Jung Garam’s comment, Woo Ragi snorted and sarcastically said, “Still, you’d at least be taller?”

“You wanna die, hyung?”

“This punk must think he’s alive right now?” Woo Ragi snorted.

Immediately Jung Garam looked at Woo Ragi as if the young Assassin were ready to fight at any moment; Woo Ragi raised his chin arrogantly, unwilling to lose to the younger.

I was nervous, worried that if they continued they would start brandishing their blades around recklessly.

Seo Dawon cut the short-lived energized atmosphere and intervened with a comment of his own. “First, the dummy only has one leg; it won’t suit Ragi or Garam-ie who needs to be fleet-footed. The appearance is a bit disappointing as well. No matter what, it looks suspicious. It stands out, so there are many limitations on our use of the dummy.”

“That’s because this is the basic form. To make it more useful, a huge amount of gems are required.”

Seo Dawon offered his very logical reasoning, and Choi Kyung-sik shrugged lightly, agreeing to his statement. Garam-ie also seemed mollified by the promise that the dummy wouldn’t become his new body; he reigned in his annoyance and leaned back against the sofa with arms folded across his chest.

At that moment, Kim Olim, who seemed to be lost in thought all this while, belatedly expressed her own opinion. “Can’t you make it as close to human-like as possible? Unless it’s at a level where I can move and utilize my equipped weapons without being hindered, I don’t think using a dummy would be all that beneficial.”

As soon as Kim Olim finished speaking, Choi Kyung-sik rubbed his chin as if he were caught in a dilemma. “There’s no dummy at that level. To reproduce a living body, a dummy is insufficient… you’d need at least a [homunculus]. That’s even more expensive and time-consuming than a golem.”

“Homunculus?”

“Yes. A [Homunculus], unlike the dummy, is trickier to make than a Golem due to its half-organic qualities. It’s hard to mass-produce as well… Moreover, when I changed my class into an alchemist, I had already chosen to receive a [Golem] recipe. So, to create the [Homunculus], I’d have to first acquire a skill book. However, since it’s so unpopular, it’ll be hard to find a recipe. If it were during the [Red Lotus] heydays, we would have all sorts of avenues with money and manpower, but… I think it’s impossible in our current situation.” Like an engineer, Choi Kyung-sik explained in detail why that method wouldn’t work. While this explanation could have been filled with hard-to-understand jargon, the Alchemist tried his best to make sure we understood and eagerly expressed why the [Homunculus] was so difficult to create.

‘Mmm… Then, I guess we can’t do that.’

So, though I honestly didn’t fully understand, I understood that Choi Kyung-sik found it impossible…

Seo Dawon, who kept nodding as he listened to the Alchemist, smiled as soon as Choi Kyung-sik’s long and wordy explanation was finished. “Then, organize the materials and time needed to make the [Homunculus].”

“…What? Really, to put it another way, since this is a difficult method considering our current circumstances, I’d rather we…”

“So, it’s just hard, not impossible?”

For the first time, I saw a crack in Choi Kyung-sik’s slick expression. Speechless, Choi Kyung-sik pushed up his glasses with his middle finger; he nodded with a slightly weary expression. Of course, simultaneously, he

tried to argue until the very end. “…Yes, well… But, according to my calculations, it’ll take at least five years to acquire the ingredients.”

“Haha. Since 5 years is a long time… Isn’t there a way to reduce that to 5 weeks?

“…What? 5 weeks?!”

“Is there no way?”

“……”

I was a little shocked. Seo Dawon was… He was far from what I saw in Choi Kyung-sik’s [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

‘He seemed like such a balanced and ardent leader in the memory…’

He seemed like such a rational leader who communicated well with others…

However, looking at Choi Kyung-sik’s drooped shoulders–as if the Alchemist had given up… perhaps this intimidating Seo Dawon was closer to the real Seo Dawon than the one I saw within the [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

Choi Kyung-sik’s despicably chic expression became wan, like the living dead. “I…don’t think it’s impossible…”

“Report on this matter in two days.”

“Huh? But…”

“We don’t have much time. Did I resurrect you before Chanyoung or Eunji for nothing?”

“……”

“You can do it, right?”

"……Yes."

Seo Dawon playfully charged the Alchemist with 'proving his usefulness.' Choi Kyung-sik's complexion became a little paler.

In such a quiet living room, everyone could hear Woo Ragi's quiet mumble. "Ah, fucker… It feels like I've gone back to work."

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung…your rose-colored glasses for Seo Dawon are so thick. You were there as Jung Garam when Choi Kyung-sik complained about how Seo Dawon was asking the impossible from him in making the potions that would render Priests obsolete. Choi Kyung-sik definitely has way more complaints about Dawon as a guild leader (than the rest) so it stands to reason that the Alchemist is trying to give Hamster a different perspective of the guild leader.

Also! Last call for those that would like to try their hand at being a proofreader! As always, just DM me on discord!

Footnotes

1. . , literally means (my opinion is definitely the opposite). The formality of the words are changed, but I figure the localization is more important.

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Chapter 214

Chapter 214

TL note: I’m not sure why spacing/indentation is off for this chapter and the last

After cutting through the silence, Woo Ragi stretched his long legs and rose from his seat. Then, he pressed on Choi Kyung-sik’s small head with the palm of his hand. “I told you that you wouldn’t be able to escape from this even after you died, right?”

“You’re in the same situation–would you please stop putting on airs?”

“Nope. I’m free and without debts; you’re Seo Dawon’s slave.”

“…Even after dying and coming back to life, I see that your maw [1] is still the same.”

No matter how I squinted, this scene was completely different from a warm reunion between long-lost colleagues.

Choi Kyung-sik didn’t lose to Woo Ragi–still bantered back and forth with the swordsman–but it still felt like the poor Alchemist was crushed. He wasn’t laughing as leisurely as he did before… In contrast to Woo Ragi’s grin, his face gradually turned pale, looking half-dead.

So, I inadvertently looked carefully up at Seo Dawon, sitting next to me. I wondered if he actually threatened Choi Kyung-sik and was holding him hostage.

Seo Dawon, as if he accurately read my thoughts from my impure eyes, crossed his legs. Then, as if he were an innocent, altruistic soul, he spoke gently, “Ragi says such strange things. Kyung-sik-ie and I have a very egalitarian and lawful contract.”

“……”

However, if we looked back on all that had happened since the servant contract, Seo Dawon had never hesitated to take advantage of others; he had the talent to control others and not let them do as they pleased… Strangely, all of a sudden, I felt an incomprehensible emotion rise for the Alchemist. It was a bit too weak to be called sympathy. I would never call it affection–but maybe it was similar to curiosity… My hostile feelings towards the other seemed to have slightly eased.

‘Previously, Seo Dawon said that he pulled Choi Kyung-sik out of an unfavorable lawsuit… Does the Alchemist owe him because of that?’

As I thought that, I gave Choi Kyung-sik a side-long glance. When he met my eyes, he released a long sigh and murmured a complaint. “…If I could turn back time, I would never have gotten involved with guildmaster-nim.”

“That makes me upset?”

“If I hadn’t followed hyung, I would have retired in my 40s and lived as a landowner. Rather than being upset, you should restore my life to its original state.” Choi Kyung-sik didn’t hide his annoyance and continued to talk back to the Mage.

I was surprised by the way Choi Kyung-sik nonchalantly revealed his honest opinions. In a way, it was true their current situation was caused by Seo Dawon’s failure….

So, when Choi Kyung-sik pinpointed the Mage’s weakness, I couldn’t help but to sharply gasp and stare at Seo Dawon. But, how should I say this… Choi Kyung-sik’s words bookended things so nice that, rather than

adding to the chilly vibe, the atmosphere gradually began to become lively. As if the Alchemist had broken through the awkwardness of the situation.

‘How very… He spoke so meanly, but it’s strangely refreshing…’

Seo Dawon no longer maintained distance; his attitude became more honest. In other words, he retread familiar modes of communication as he began to sarcastically quarrel with Choi Kyung-sik with a relaxed tone. “Kyung-sik-ie is like that. He’s good at saying things he doesn’t particularly mean. He’s a bit shy?”

“Is there anyone who doesn’t know that I was kicked out of my previous job for improper speech conduct?”

“Of course people know. Also, I’m the savior that delivered you out of that hell.”

“It was a contract with the devil.”

“Think of how high your career soared when you came to Red Lotus.”

“That was the result of all my vacations being cut short due to crazy workload.”

“You’re the type to get better results when under a little pressure.”

“If that’s considered just ‘a little pressure,’ all the alchemists would probably have killed themselves and left no one around them behind. But, since I’m me, I could meet Guildmaster-nim’s ridiculous demands.”

There was something cute about Choi Kyung-sik, who looked annoyed by Seo Dawon’s gentle attitude. Maybe it was because he looked so much like a geeky ‘scholar.’ [2]… Slowly, I began to slightly understand the Alchemist’s personality, and my body released some tension.

At that time, Kim Olim, who showed no interest in their argument, as if she found it all tiresome and boring, suddenly picked up her ringing cell phone and stopped when she saw the caller. She handed over the still

ringing phone over to me as she said, “I was going to tell you something once you awoke, but it slipped my mind.”

“W-What is it?”

“Koo Hui-seo called yesterday as well.”

“Why? What happened…”

“I didn’t allow him to meet you since you’ve been in a bad condition; but it seems his patience has reached its limit. He says that if you don’t fulfill your promise, he’ll break the contract.”

“What?”

What kind of promise…Just as I thought that, I recalled how I had obtained Koo Hui-seo’s blood and accepted his invitation to visit his home before I could activate Choi Kyung-sik’s contract…

‘I completely forgot…’

I thought this was a bit troublesome, but I received the cell phone that the Paladin handed over. And Seo Dawon, sitting next to me, looked at the phone with blatant loathing.

[Koo Hui-seo]

Of course, I also felt complicated when I saw the name on the screen. He was someone who could pull a sigh from me just by looking at his name.

“Mm… First things first, I should take this…?”

Still, a promise was a promise; I looked around at everyone before touching the screen. Among all those around me, I was most conscious of Seo Dawon. Although I knew there was little difference by now, I

intentionally switched to speaker-phone. Then, taking a deep breath, I carefully opened my mouth. “Hello?”

[……]

“Hello?”

[……]

“Excuse…me? [3] It’s Koo Hui-seo right? I’d like it if we could get to business as quickly as possible.”

[Ha……]

I said he should spit out what his business was as soon as possible, but all that answered me was a strange, back-chilling sigh.

Seo Dawon began to tap his toes. In anycase, the rapidly chilling vibe wasn’t the only problem. Though I was curious about Seo Dawon’s expression and wanted to turn around, I hurried to talk nervously to Koo Hui-seo again. “Hui-seo-ssi, I’ve been sick all this while and haven’t been able to meet you. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to break my promise.”

[……]

“I think we’ll be able to meet by tomorrow. Therefore… Excuse me, are you listening to me?”

[Ye~es…]

“……”

[‘*Hngh…*’]

Koo Hui-seo immediately replied to my question in a hushed tone.

But, following that answer, was a brief, strangely sharp groan. I thought I had misheard, but the groan continued to cut through the silence.

That sound was… It made me feel unpleasant. It was just like…that bastard was calling me with some kind of lewd video in the background.

‘No way… No matter how much of a pervert this bastard may be, that’s….something like that is…’

I wanted to deny any assumptions my mind conjured, but I was caught by a deep sense of doubt. I recalled all that Koo Hui-seo had done so far; I couldn’t speak.

At that moment–Jung Garam must have heard the same sounds I did–the Assassin casually threw out a comment. “He’s not masturbating, is he?”

“……”

[No. I was playing with Kyungman-ie.]

While I froze, unable to answer Jung Garam, Koo Hui-seo responded with a bright voice through the receiver.

I wanted to reproach the man for answering so calmly, but… I got a headache at the thought of arguing with him, so I decided to just ignore him. However, whatever that ‘play’ could involve, Koo Kyungman continued to grunt out the occasional faint, cut-off groans.

[Lee-kyung-ssi is just too much. I was super upset…I couldn’t get in touch with you at all…I was so bored and lonely that I, to Kyungman-ie…]

“……”

[So, I decided to… *‘Gasp…!’*… Hmm, fool around a little…]

“……”

[Kyungman-ie has loosened a lot, so it’s no longer as much fun…]

What on earth had loosened? It was not like Koo Kyung-man was some self-assembled toy… As I was getting more and more stressed by his

peculiar word choice–diction that made me imagine such severely dark scenes–Seo Dawon spoke coldly, “How did you hear Jung Garam’s voice?”

“……!” I was stunned by Seo Dawon’s question and froze. Come to think of it, Jung Garam hadn’t been physically summoned. If the servants weren’t summoned, no one else could see the manifestations of their soul-like apparitions nor hear their voices. Hui-seo’s answer, just now, made chills run down my back.

Once again, Koo Hui-seo did not need for the servant’s voice to be conveyed through my own voice and answered Seo Dawon directly.

[I think…it’s because something of me has been left behind in Lee-kyung-ssi… Until you wash that out, I’ll be mixed in as well.] [4]

His tone was languid…and yet joyful at the same time.

TL: This is why I think Choi Kyung-sik is such an interesting kid. He’s a bit of a blunt tsundere (ish) but also someone that is wholly focused on his survival. I think he sees a little bit of his own situation in Choi Lee-kyung tbh. As much as (implied) he is thankful for Seo Dawon’s interference in his issues, Choi Kyungsik is still a wary individual who realizes that he’s also a bit of a shrimp in a whale fight (and in danger because of that). Thankfully, I think Hamster realized that Choi Kyung-sik doesn’t hate him or anything here~

Also RIP Koo Kyungman

Footnotes

1. = informal way to say mouth.
2. (sennim) = someone who's nerdy, geeky, and old-fashioned. Often used to describe prideful scholars of old.
3. Lee-kyung is switching to a formal tone here.
4. Koo Hui-seo is using incredibly vague language here

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Chapter 215

Chapter 215

A Necromancer contract was processed through the medium of ‘blood.’ That’s why I was always required to split open my palm to initiate the [Vengeful Ghost Contract].

However, due to the increasingly twisted [Vengeful Ghost Memories] and the ‘contract risk’ (which my servants still have yet to explain in detail), I sacrificed Koo Hui-seo’s blood instead of my own.

[It’s not that I couldn’t hear anything before…]

“……”

[After the contract, their voices have sounded clearer… Well, there’s no need to be so wary about this, though…]

As a result of that replacement, a few side-effects occurred. In other words, Koo Hui-seo became more aware of the servants.

Of course, even before we used the man’s blood, he informed us that he was aware of the servants’ existence. However, rather than just being aware of their presence, to hear that Koo Hui-seo could clearly hear the servants’ voices, enough to hold a conversation with them… This was an unpredictable occurrence; the tension in the room rose as the conversation continued.

I wasn’t sure how to handle this situation, so I looked towards Seo Dawon. Seo Dawon continued coldly, unfazed. “Did you know that this

would happen?”

[I slightly expected this result…]

“So you knew and yet you didn’t tell us…deliberately?”

[You didn’t ask?]

Koo Hui-seo’s response took on a mocking tone. I was worried that the Mage might shout at Koo Hui-seo at this rate, but Seo Dawon continued to speak calmly. “It’ll be quite troublesome if you continue to keep secrets from us.”

[Mm, I don’t know what you’re worried about… but don’t worry… I like Lee-kyung-ssi, so… I haven’t told anyone, yet.]

“Yet?”

[Yes… I didn’t want to put you in a troublesome situation.]

Koo Hui-seo meekly blurted out that last sentence, as if he were seeking my praise.

The corners of Seo Dawon’s lips rose crookedly, as if he had heard something ridiculous. “You’re the troublesome one, Koo Hui-seo.”

[Me?]

“On the day you’re too indiscreet, and the contract is discovered, you’re going back to the hospital.”

[……]

“This time, you’ll truly be ‘alone.’ Are you alright with that?”

[……]

Koo Hui-seo’s giggling voice had been completely shut down. I could clearly feel the man’s befuddlement–he truly didn’t expect Seo Dawon to

threaten to shove him back in the hospital.

However, Seo Dawon didn’t stop there and softly, tenaciously, placed more pressure on Koo Hui-seo. “It’s only natural for a slave like you to uphold and protect the contract. You didn’t tell us that using your blood as sacrifice could insidiously insert itself into Lee-kyung’s abilities. After living as a Witch’s son for thirty years, you should know what you’re placing at stake for playing around with a contract.”

[……]

“Or… have you not yet broken habits from when you were a ‘parasite’?” [1]

[*‘Arghhhhh!’*]

As soon as Seo Dawon’s sarcastic remarks finished, someone–Koo Kyungman, I presume–shouted and soon fell silent. Any signs of groans or other noises disappeared. I thought the call had ended, but, before long, Koo Hui-seo spoke in a slightly subdued voice.

[I don’t want to speak any longer with… Seo Dawon-ssi… I’ll call again later, Lee-kyung-ssi.]

“…Alright.” I hesitated and, then, decided to hang up for now. I could hear Koo Hui-seo’s faint breathing until I finally disconnected; I thought I heard the occasional whimper… Perhaps he was crying.

I don’t know if he was crying because he was intimidated or because he was angered, but I felt sorry at the thought of a grown man clinging to the call–despite being in tears–until I finally hung up. Also, even though this was Koo Hui-seo, the memory of how he had been locked up as a chimeric tree in an empty room was still vivid in my mind… I felt an automatic sense of pity.

However, when I hung up, I breathed a sigh of relief. ‘Even though he’s pitiful… I’d like to limit my conversations with him as much as possible.’

In particular, I didn’t want to deal with Koo Hui-seo while he was currently interacting with Koo Kyungman. What kind of torture was inflicted upon the brother? Before my complicated feelings towards Koo Hui-seo could even disappear, the weighty sound of the doorbell rang throughout the living room.

[Ding Dong–]

I snapped back from my daze and stared at the front door then at the Mage. I asked him with my eyes if we had another guest scheduled to visit today.

“Who’s that?”

“No one’s supposed to visit today…” However, Seo Dawon seemed ignorant as well; he loosened the arms crossed over his chest. I briefly wondered if the visitor might be Kim Sangyoon, but the Warrior usually sent an extremely formal message before seeking me out for an appointment. The identity of the sudden visitor became even more mystifying.

Eventually, Woo Ragi, the only one standing at this time, took the initiative to stride towards the intercom screen. He pressed the [Connect] button in order to see the visitor’s face. “How did this bastard know how to find this place? No way, Choi Lee-kyung, did you promise to meet him here?”

“What? W-Who is it…?

In lieu of answering, Woo Ragi turned his body to show me the intercom screen. Then, I opened my mouth, astonished, at the image of the man.

On the screen, I could see a man in a suit with his shirt buttoned all the way up to the collar–despite the fact that the summer temperature had yet to disappear and the days were still sweltering. However, that stuffy-looking outfit perfectly suited the the man’s cold eyes. I guess you could say that the aesthetic was well balanced.

[I know you’re home… You should open the door before I tear it off its hinges.]

However, unlike his appearance, the man had a fiery personality. I stared dumbfoundedly at the screen; when the man summoned metal knuckles into his hand–as if he were ready to strike–I cried out in shock. “Why on earth is Moon Issak here!?”

[Bang–!]

Before I could open the door, Moon Issak punched it and smashed through. I made eye contact with the man through the untouched screen door and the hole in the front door.

As soon as he saw me, Moon Issak smiled, baring the neat rows of his teeth. Then, instead of greeting me, he said, “Choi Lee-kyung-ssi. This is your fault–why did you ignore all the messages I sent?” [2]

After seeing how speechless I was, he tilted his head, put his hand through the hole, and unlocked the half-hanging lock. He was skillful–as if he had done this once or twice before.

“What are you gonna do?” Woo Ragi, in front of me, hand slightly outstretched. His tone indicated that the question wasn’t meant for me but for Seo Dawon standing next to me.

Seo Dawon stared at Moon Issak with a rare blank face, but I felt irritation far beyond anger emanating from him. I was more nervous about the Mage than Moon Issak, who had just punched through the door…

The Mage flared his bloodlost as he kept his eyes trained on Moon Issak who entered after opening the screen door. “We’ll have to block him.”

“Are you gonna kill him? Don’t think we can stop him from talking.”

“……”

However, if I thought about it further, we were in a position where we're unable to touch the investigator. In order to subdue him, it would be necessary to summon a Servant; in that scenario, Moon Issak would 100% recognize the Red Lotus guild member. How would he react in that situation… A splitting headache ransacked my head.

Further, in addition to other reasons as to why Moon Issak couldn't be 'dealt with' at this point in time, the act of breaking open the front door and loudly entering the house may have attracted witnesses. He was a celebrity involved with various social work; if he was murdered or assumed missing, too much attention would be drawn towards us. Therefore, even Seo Dawon couldn't help but be worried about this dangerous situation.

Eventually, Moon Issak stood in front of me without any obstructions. Of course he wouldn't know, but the investigator had a sword pointed at his neck. I relaxed a little at the sight of Woo Ragi's echo swords directly under Moon Issak's chin. "What business do you have with me?"

Moon Issak's expression didn't hide how much he looked down on me. "Why would you do such an upsetting thing like ignoring my messages, making a busy man like myself come all this way?"

"…I was injured and was in no state to check my inbox."

"And you don't think you'll be injured if I were to hit you?"

'This bastard is a total bully…' Unable to hide my rising anger, I glared at him. But, in the end, I sighed instead of feeding my anger and apologized to the investigator. "I apologize. However, I truly didn't intend to ignore you."

Then, I opened my status window and pressed on the 'Friend message' tab. I had to check what made him storm into my home.

Become a Patron!

TL: Poor Hamster, he just woke up and is dealing with not 1 but 2 headaches.

Footnotes

1. I’m assuming, Seo Dawon is addressing Koo Hui-seo’s current personality as a parasite that fed off of Hui-seo’s other personalities.
2. Originally, this would be “messages I sent through the friend tab”. Aka, in this world, you can send messages to people you’ve “added as a friend” in the system.

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Chapter 216

Chapter 216

’Honestly, he didn’t even send all that many messages!’

When I checked my message inbox with Moon Issak, only five lines appeared.

[**Moon Issak:** kekekeke]
[**Moon Issak:** Let’s meet soon and talk. You know my number, right?]
[**Moon Issak:** hehe]
[**Moon Issak:** It says you’ve been holing up at home, why aren’t you replying?]
[**Moon Issak:** I’m not fond of this ‘playing hard to get’ tactic.]

More importantly, these messages had just been sent yesterday. It wasn’t like I’d been some stay-at-home recluse that you’d been trying to keep in contact with; he broke through someone else’s door just because I hadn’t hurried to answer his texts for 10 hours… I could clearly sense that this guy was an insane jerk.

However…

“…I was truly resting at home because I wasn’t feeling well. I just saw those messages for the first time. I didn’t intend to ignore you…” Eventually, apologies dropped out of my mouth. I’d always known that the

other wasn’t one to have much common sense. I could judge that he wasn’t one to reflect upon his own faults.

At my submissive posture, Moon Issak looked at me with his arms folded, as if he were searching for something. I adopted a relaxed expression, staring at Woo Ragi and hoping that the swordsman would now take back his echo blades from where it was, next to his nape.

Woo Ragi locked eyes with my blatant stare, raised one of his eyebrows, and asked, “Want me to stab him now?”

’Honestly, whether it’s that guy or this guy…’

Perhaps Seo Dawon noticed the signs of frustration flooding through me, the Mage waved his hands. Only then did Woo Ragi docilely collect his echo blades.

However, at that moment, Moon Issak suddenly placed his hand on my face. To be exact, he placed his palm on my forehead. It was so unexpected; I couldn’t avoid him. I shuddered and shivered at the coldness that came into contact with my skin.

Moon Issak murmured to himself, “You actually have a fever.”

”…….”

”Did he not have money to buy potions? He lives in such a good house.” Afterwards, Moon Issak slowly lowered his hand, though he did not completely take his fingers away. As he slid down, his fingertips swept across all the curves of my face.

As he frowned, brows furrowing in strange displeasure, Moon Issak stopped with his index and middle finger on my collar bone. He then slowly activated his skill. “[Remedy].”

Sacred light wrapped around Moon Issak’s fingertips and began to permeate into my body. Then, my body felt like it disassociated, rising

slightly before falling down into its proper place. As my slight fever fell, my body began to return to normal.

“Moon Issak’s personally treating you?” Choi Kyung-sik, watching this scene, blurted out, as if he were surprised. I stood, dazed…uncertain of how I should react to his unexpected kindness.

Moon Issak immediately manifested his inventory, took out a potion with the label [hand sanitizer] printed on it, and cleaned his hands. Very meticulously…as if he touched something incredibly filthy.

In particular, he wiped his right hand so thoroughly–almost to the point that his nails may fall off… Watching that, my dislike overtook my bewildered gratitude.

After washing his hands well, Moon Issak turned to look at me with an absurd expression. “It’ll be bothersome if you catch a cold. Healing skills don’t work well on you.”

“…Yes, well… Thank you.”

“I tend to treat torture wounds I’ve dealt others. You’re not special, so please don’t feel too emotional.”

“……”

He pointed at me with his chin, continuing his unfriendly comments. “Well, then. Shall we continue our conversation? It’s not a matter that should be discussed while standing.”

Jung Garam, who had been throwing and catching his dagger brazenly, whispered, “Hyung, can’t we just kill him?”

I felt Seo Dawon contemplate that proposition; I hurried and walked ahead in order to protect Moon Issak in this rapidly deteriorating atmosphere. “…Follow me.”

I turned my back on Moon Issak and inhaled a deep breath, but… For some reason, my head still felt heavy even though I had already been

treated.

* * *

I eventually took the inspector to the table next to the living room. As soon as Moon Issak sat across from me, he took out a long tape recorder from his embrace–the same kind of recording device that reporters might use. Without much explanation, he pressed the recorder's playback button.

Soon, the familiar voices of Moon Issak and Bae Jaemin could be heard from within the recording.

[Beatrice? Why would you ask about that?]

Bae Jaemin's voice was unexpectedly calm. However, the tempo of his words was faster than usual–at least from the previous conversations I had had with him. It was a subtle difference. However, those that knew the Priest could definitely notice that this line of questioning was a sore subject for him.

[Hm? My question has no particular significance. Am I perhaps…the first person to ask you about that rosary?]

Moon Issak responded languidly. The inspector seemed to be pretending ignorance to the significance of his words, treating his question as nothing more than a greeting and needling Bae jaemin for his sensitivity. Just from his voice, I could gauge that the man had an artful acting talent–it seemed the Priest was taken in by the man's act.

In a calm voice, Bae Jaemin replied,

[It's quite different when Civil Administrator Moon-nim asks than when others pry, isn't it?]

[Haha. I’ve never seen you so nervous, Bae Jaemin-ssi. I wonder if the Jeju Island incident has made you a bit thin-skinned.]

Moon Issak spoke as if he were playing with his food–Bae Jaemin. He felt a bit arrogant. The Priest must have finally returned to his senses; he responded elegantly.

[…It’s because the investigation has been prolonged. Even now I’m beginning to wonder if you’re still working the case… As a guild master, I have no choice but to worry.]

The priest sounded sincere, yet this response was incredibly clever as well. Moon Issak, listening along, said, “Jaemin-ssi was an incredibly good actor. If I had never gotten your tip, I wouldn’t have bothered to dig further.”

”……” I didn’t bother reacting to the Moon Issak and leaned my ear towards the recorder. After a brief moment of silence, Moon Issak persistently asked Bae Jaemin about Beatrice’s origin again.

[Beatrice is just a personal interest of mine. Other items that Bae Jaemin-ssi uses have documented histories and are quite famous in their own right. However, Bea [1] is the only one that has little public data.]

[……]

[Did you obtain it illegally? Well, I also stop by the black market when bored.]

[It’s not like that, actually…]

Bae Jaemin answered in a quiet, slightly shaky voice.

[This was the last…relic that Garam-ie gave me.]

[Ah……]

[If this were to be exposed to the media, I would have no choice but to answer a personally painful line of questioning.]

[I see. I’m sorry.]

[No, it’s alright. Well… It’s not like those close to me don’t know about it. Rather than trying to hide this… I just didn’t want to talk about it… Haah.]

[Oh my, I’m being too discourteous.]

[Not at all… Mm, the person who murdered Park Hoseok pretended to be Garam-ie as well…]

[Ahh…]

[Your question suddenly reminded me of something… Haah. A lot of thoughts are scurrying about in my head.]

[Whether the culprit impersonated Jung Garam or Bae Jaemin-ssi, the lingering message isn’t all that important to the investigation.]

[Is that so…? Anyway, personally, now that these events have occurred… I’d like to catch the criminal myself.]

[I understand that.]

[Please let me know if there’s any new information on the case.]

[Of course.]

The recording ended there. I had no idea if there was more to the recording and Moon Issak had just edited this tape.

I was angry at Bae Jaemin, who could lie without scruples; my fists clenched automatically. I was worried about Jung Garam, who was sitting next to me with chin in palm.

“Did Bae Jaemin…like me?” However, rather than being furious, Jung Garam abruptly asked an absurd question.

Taking care to tiptoe around Moon Issak’s gaze, I took a furtive sidelong glance at Jung Garam. Woo Ragi placed his elbow on the young assassin’s

head and giggled, “You didn’t know?”

“Haah. It’s so tiresome to be this cute.”

They were unexpectedly unbothered by Bae Jaemin’s lies. How should I put this… It felt like they were ridiculing the Priest?

TL: I adore (1) assassin.

Also, quick update, need to go–drowning in end of semester work~

Footnotes

1. Bea, of course, is shorthand for Beatrice’s Prayer

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Chapter 217

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“Now then, that’s what he said… What do you think?” Moon Issak pressured as he clasped his hands, fingers interlocked, on the table.

His attitude expressed that he believed in neither Bae Jaemin nor me. To put it more accurately, he held an ambiguous demeanor like that of a judge who resolved to listen to both sides’ arguments.

I gave him a bemused gaze and asked, “Did you mention me to Bae Jaemin?”

“I thought about doing it when you ignored my messages… But I’m especially generous to Lee-kyung-ssi.”

“……”

“You aren’t going to refute Bae Jaemin’s explanation? It did seem quite plausible.” Moon Issak didn’t even bother to hide his curiosity.

I sighed, “Stop twisting my words. The real relationship between Jung Garam and Bae Jaemin was vastly different from what Bae Jaemin claimed. If you haven’t been afflicted with dementia ever since the Tower of Command, you could easily root out the lies through a little digging. Didn’t Moon Issak-ssi come to me because Bae Jaemin had said something so unbelievable?”

While I answered, I looked at him while tilting my chin up, deliberately daring him to find something wrong with my words.

Moon Issak was an opponent I couldn’t afford to allow him to drag me around and exploit my timid personality. The investigator squinted at my bluffs; then, with an air of resignation, he said, “However, why does Choi Lee-kyung-ssi, an uninvolved party, know about such personal matters? Lee-kyung-ssi wasn’t even a User back then.”

Once again Moon Issak did not answer my questions. I suddenly wondered if the man carried another voice recorder on his person; though such doubts plagued my mind, I pulled myself together. After all, Moon Issak must have noticed Bae Jaemin’s lies by now. Furthermore, the fact that he’d come to me about my personal history after hearing such lies must mean…

‘He needs me. Or, he thinks I’ll be a necessary tool in the future…’

I must be of some use. Therefore, this may be part of his initial steps to keep me within his grasp. Where I’d heard this information–what I could possibly know–had become a matter of importance to the investigator.

Moon Issak was definitely a hot-tempered man–and he definitely had many aspects to him that would be cause for cautious pause–but breaking through my front door was, in some way, performative. He was trying to gain dominance, an advantage, for our ‘future’ dealings. It was rare for someone to break down another’s front door without prior calculation of the consequences; in fact, it was especially uncommon for a ranker to act so rashly.

If Moon Issak was seriously considering a collaborative relationship with me, then I think I could end this conversation quickly. So, without feeling too much strain, I answered his question with a question of my own. “Moon Issak-ssi, do you perhaps have any close acquaintances among Users? It doesn’t have to be a Ranker. Or, perhaps, a friend among the high-ranked guilds.”

My question was vague as possible–while still giving off an air of danger–because I needed my words to sound significant. It didn’t matter whether or not Moon Issak answered this question. This was simply a war of wits.

Moon Issak adopted a languid, relaxed smile–wider than mine–and leaned closer on the table between us. Then, he began to answer my questions. “Who knows. These days, I think Lee-kyung-ssi and I have built something special together.”

Of course, there was no guarantee he’d give me a proper response. However, I ignored him and kept flinging questions at him. “What about anyone that could become your weak point?”

“You’re talking about a family member or a lover? I have none. However, Lee-kyung-ssi still has living parents, and he’s quite close friends with Kim Sangyoon, yes?” Moon Issak said without hesitation; he had probably uncovered this data during a background check.

The moment he mentioned my parents, my body briefly flinched, but I relaxed because I felt Seo Dawon lightly pressing on my shoulder. It felt like his touch contained the silent promise that the Mage would not allow Moon Issak to lift a single finger against my parents. So, I was able to say what I wanted to say without feeling intimidated, “Actually, asking you to interrogate Bae Jaemin about those matters is the same as asking Bae Jaemin to kill you.”

Moon Issak still smiled, but the vibe had changed. Then, with a low voice, I nudged him insidiously, “Don’t believe me? I’m certain enough to make a bet: you’ll die quietly within a month. Don’t think Bae Jaemin can do it? He managed to make that grand Red Lotus guild a distant memory in three years.”

Only then did Moon Issak completely drop his smile. Though his words remained insincerely professional, he had dropped honorifics. “Bae Jaemin would kill me just for asking him about Beatrice?”

“Yes.”

“That line of inquiry is related to a secret that would severely damage Bae Jaemin?”

“It’s central–the core, perhaps–to that secret.”

“And if I tell him that you tipped me off?”

“He’ll kill me and you. After all, Moon Issak-ssi and Bae Jaemin-ssi are not partners.”

Moon Issak, who had been asking questions one after the other, still had an indecipherable expression. He didn’t seem angry at being deceived; he didn’t seem flustered either. He simply leaned back against the chair’s backrest and placed his chin in his palm…as if he were discussing someone else’s dilemma.

Soon after, he took out a lightly-used cigarette, lit it, and hollowed his cheeks as he took a drag from the cigarette. I continued to stare at the investigator’s pupils which were now hidden by the cigarette smoke.

“I thought you were a total pushover…” Moon Issak murmured.

“…….”

“I guess you weren’t that perverted.” [1]

His voice that wafted through the lazy smoke was unexpectedly light and amused, as if he had heard some entertaining joke.

After that, he continued to smoke without saying another word. Then, after rubbing the cigarette butt against my table, he completely ignored my frown and spoke languidly, “Sure there were rumors–that Bae Jaemin was suspicious. His other guild members were all exterminated, but only he alone came back alive. There were too many ambiguous testimonies as well. During the first investigations, there were things that didn’t add up. Of course there were many people that liked to chatter and make noise about that. There were quite a few media outlets that were preparing to report on the dungeon expedition as well.”

“……”

“But, one day everyone’s interest suddenly cooled off. The biggest issue, beyond that, was that the people digging into the case gradually

disappeared. Some people from the investigation team moved on to join a media company where Bae Jaemin owned 15% of the shares, some died or went missing within dungeons… Furthermore, the documentary on the expedition, which Channel H had been preparing for over 1 ambitious year, was banned from broadcasting its contents at the request of the bereaved families. Seo Dawon's parents included among them."

"……"

"The civil administrators that were requesting for a re-investigation from the Dungeon Association died within the dungeons. The quick-witted folks probably clamped their mouths shut."

"……"

"Those who truly didn't really care about the truth of that situation, like me, weren't really looking to question things anyways. Even I had only recently heard about these rumors from a retiree I spent painstaking effort to contact while investigating."

While silently listening to Moon Issak's explanation, I was a little shaken by the news that Seo Dawon's parents banned the documentary broadcast of their expeditions. However, Seo Dawon didn't react much.

Moon Issak took out another lightly-used cigarette, bit it with his lips, and chewed on it gently for a few minutes. Then, he quietly asked, "HaHae, Virtuoso Workshop, and Red Dragon as well… There are so many people involved. Are there more culprits I don't know about?"

I hesitated to answer, but, from all that Moon Issak had said so far, I judged the investigator had no intention of withdrawing from our mutual cooperation. I whispered quietly, "If you're asking about guilds, Opera should also be included."

"……"

Judging from the investigator's silence, he must have been surprised that [Opera] was involved. Well… Considering Seo Dawon and Ryu Hyerin's

relationship before [Red Lotus]'s extermination, his confusion at Hyerin's involvement was understandable.

However, Moon Issak crushed the tip of his cigarette with his teeth before throwing it away. "Hm. Was it a Lover's quarrel?"

"What?"

"I'm talking about Seo Dawon. Was Ryu Hyerin upset bc that guy couldn't fix his habits and returned to being a dirty dishrag…" [2]

"Of course not!" I lost my temper and bumped into the table.

Moon Issak looked at me as if he saw something strange; I bowed my head, belatedly feeling a rush of embarrassment.

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung you're doing so well T_T

Footnotes

1. Moon Issak is amking a reference to masochism here.
2. Remember, dirty dishrag is slang for whore.

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Chapter 218

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“Are you perhaps one of those? A Seo Dawon stan… Hah. No, It’s fine.” Snorting, Moon Issak swallowed his words; he looked at me as if he were seeing some obsessive fan. [1] I wanted to defend myself, but I swallowed my words; there was no way I could explain myself without revealing Seo Dawon’s identity and involvement in this current situation.

“…A-As far as I know, this wasn’t Seo Dawon’s fault. That catastrophe and Seo Dawon’s private life have no connection…!” Still, I felt the investigator’s words were unfair. Conscious of the mage sitting next to me, I argued in Seo Dawon’s defense. But, to my chagrin, Moon Issak didn’t seem to pay much heed to my argument.

“Well, enough of that. Tell me what you’re planning to do in the future. I understand that you wanted to distract Bae Jaemin with me, but…what were you planning to do with the time I’d buy you?”

I had no choice but to answer Moon Issak’s pointed and important question. Although I was annoyed that he interrupted me, I gave a resigned sigh, “…I wanted to find evidence that Bae Jaemin was the culprit that killed Park Hoseok.”

As I spoke, I lowered my eyes and shuttered my expression so that the other would not notice my lie.

Moon Issak acted as though he revealed everything to me, but he was still a celebrated investigator–the lead investigator in charge of Park

Hoseok’s murder case. However, the true culprit was Jung Garam, and he was my servant. If I admitted my involvement here, it’d be the same as going to the police to confess all my crimes…

Therefore, I couldn’t be totally honest with Moon Issak. Right now, the investigator seemed to be obsessed with the topic of ‘Bae Jaemin’. Though he may consider me an assistant or a collaborator, I considered him an opponent that needed to be thoroughly exploited.

That’s why I tried to fixate his full attention onto Bae Jaemin, dangling suspicious rumors and the names of the Priest’s collaborators as bait. Either way, my group intended to ruin all of Bae Jaemin’s plans, so we may as well pin everything on the Priest.

Fortunately, Moon Issak didn’t doubt me. Rather, he wasn’t suspicious of what I told him… instead, he cast doubt on my capabilities. “You plan to do that alone?”

“……”

“Wouldn’t it be more efficient to hand me your information source? Our Choi Lee-kyung-ssi has a lot of guts, but… he doesn’t have the ability to back that up. Or do you have something that’s giving you faith in a victory?”

I listened silently to Moon Issak’s sarcasm before mentioning another name that would rattle the investigator. “…Koo Hui-seo-ssi will protect me.”

As expected, though Moon Issak adopted a sly smile, he didn’t refute my words. He must have known to some extent that I’d include Koo Hui-seo. “How did you get to know Koo Hui-seo?”

“I can’t tell you that yet.”

“Ah, so you’re playing that card…Is he, perhaps, your boyfriend?”

“What nonsense…!” The conversation moved beyond my expectations. Brows furrowed, I emphatically denied his accusation, “It’s nothing like that, so please don’t say that again. It makes me uncomfortable.”

“Is it because Koo Hui-seo looks similar to Seo Dawon?”

“What? Is there something wrong with your eyes?”

”I’m joking. Whew…look at your glare…It looks like you’re about to hit me.”

At that moment, Seo Dawon, who had been tapping his finger on the table, paused.

I was most frustrated that this had all happened in front of the mage. Though I recognized that Moon Issak was poking at me for his amusement, I had to have the final word. “They’re completely different. Our relationship is nothing like what you’ve guessed. No matter how hard Koo Hui-seo tries, I…”

“Aha…so, it’s Koo Hui-seo’s one-sided affection.”

“……”

Because of my unnecessary words, I revealed information that Koo Hui-seo had been trying to garner my affections, information that Moon Issak had didn’t need to be told.

Watching me bite my tongue, Moon Issak laughed; his eyes curved into crescent moon shapes. “I guess you’re more popular than I thought? Although, I don’t think Koo Hui-seo is someone you want to string along.”

“I’ve made it clear that our relationship isn’t like that. You can’t claim I’m a liar in the future.”

“Well, I guess that’s something I can find out by observing you two.”

“The personal relationship between me and Koo Hui-seo isn’t important. It has nothing to do with Bae Jaemin either.”

When I moved the conversation to more serious matters, Moon Issak finally reigned in his mean-spirited jeers and folded his arms across his chest. “You probably want me to make things bothersome for Bae Jaemin and buy you some time.”

“That’s right.”

“How much time do you need?”

“How long can you drag him around?”

“You said it’d be a month before my throat is slashed.” Moon Issak smiled, revealing his pearly white teeth. “I can definitely drag him around for a month. When the underlings are stretched thin, the boss’ duties become busy and complicated.”

“Then…”

“But, if I drag him around for you, are you’ll be able to prepare a trap–a noose around his neck?”

“……”

“I’m disappointed to see that you can’t offer me an immediate answer. I’m risking my life right now.”

I hesitated, uncertain as to how far I could shake and destabilize Bae Jaemin within a month. Then, Seo Dawon whispered to me, “Tell him that one month is more than enough.”

“…A month is more than enough.” Though I spoke falteringly, I followed Seo Dawon’s advice.

However, Moon Issak didn’t look satisfied. “Oh… That expression doesn’t inspire an ounce of confidence.”

Seo Dawon spoke calmly, as if he were directly speaking to the investigator, “Tell him that within a month, Bae Jaemin will be too busy to be interested in plucking his life.”

I summarized and conveyed the mage's words, "…In about a month's time, Bae Jaemin-ssi will be concerned with some other trouble. He won't have the time to pay attention to us."

"Then, should I expect you'll be responsible for everything that'll happen up until that point?" Moon Issak's tone was light and casual, but his eyes glaring from behind his spectacles had an unusually chilling gleam.

Of course I wanted to avoid his eyes–I was planning to place Bae Jaemin in trouble. Who would be so daring to tell the police of their plans to commit a crime?

However, I couldn't afford to back down now, so I forced the corners of my lips to curl up into a smile. "Bae Jaemin's past is quite colorful. He's like a mine–there's so much to dig up…"

"Really? I'll look forward to that." With that said, Moon Issak finally rose from his seat. He then took out a flask that resembled a spray bottle filled with some unknown potion from his inventory and sprayed it over himself a few times. The subtle smell of tobacco that clung to his body disappeared; instead the refreshing scent of greenery wafted from him. The scent itched my nose, so I held my breath as I stood up.

"From now on, I'd like you to respond to my messages immediately. Now that you've told me such entertaining stories, if I'm unable to contact you… I'll be so worried." He neatly swept back his hair with his hand and looked at me with a friendly expression. As soon as I heard his rude yet formal speech, I was relieved; we safely passed through this conversation.

"I'll respond… I won't let a day pass."

"A day is too long, please respond within an hour," Moon Issak said overbearingly as he started putting on his shoes in front of the door.

I had no intent to consistently respond to him within an hour, but I wanted to push this man out of my house immediately. I smiled politely, "I'll try."

“That’s not a definite answer…” However, Moon Issak did not leave and blatantly stared at me with a piercing look, accompanied by a shallow smile. Then, as if he were talking to himself, he mumbled, “Doesn’t Koo Hui-seo get impatient with this?”

“What did you say?”

“I don’t like it when you play hard to get.”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I’m not in that sort of relationship with Koo Hui-seo!” Eventually, the smile I spent so much effort on maintaining became distorted.

Honestly, what was he imagining between me and Koo Hui-seo? Regardless of my unimpressed face, Moon Issak teased me until the end, pushing my half-broken front door open with his toes. “By the way, you haven’t told me my salary for helping you with this job.”

“What?”

“I’ll have to hear Bae Jaemin’s whines for a month… You weren’t expecting me to do this for free, were you?”

“W-What do you want…”

“How much do you get from Koo Hui-seo? Your allowance.”

“……”

“You said he wasn’t your boyfriend.” The way Moon Issak looked at me, from head to toe, was so nauseating. I bit my lips, contemptful, and glared at him.

Moon Issak looked satisfied, as if he had sipped some finest, highest-grade wine. How should I put this… he looked like he enjoyed being hated and despised by others.

“Don’t make such an intense expression–it makes me want to stay.”

“……”

“Think about it carefully until we meet again.”

TL: Seo Dawon stan is a good descriptor for Lee-kyung tbh.

Footnotes

1. (gwang fan) is literally “more than a fan”–any fan that’s just too invested in the celebrity. Think Sasaeng fans in Kpop

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Chapter 219

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“Sighhhhhh….” It wasn’t until I saw Moon Issak placidly enter his car that I released my repressed sigh. My nerves, which had been stretched taut like a rubber band, suddenly loosened.

“Lee-kyung-ssi. Let’s first fix the front door with the system.”

“…Yeah.”

However, as soon as I became a relaxed mush, Choi Kyung-sik pinpointed what I should do, forcing me into action. I pressed at the front door for a long while, manifesting the ‘Housing’ tab in the system window.

After fixing the front door, my thoughts still lingered on Moon Issak. ‘What the hell does that man think of me…’

Rather than just Moon Issak, I also lingered on Seo Dawon, who currently had his back to me with a neutral face.

Seo Dawon looked despicably composed, but he said nothing until Moon Issak left. There was no sign of the slight discomfort that would show on his face when someone would get too close to the truth for comfort. It was as if the Mage was completely disinterested.

“Then, the first person we’ll have to attack is Geum Miyoung.”

“This is a recent audit report authored by Geum Miyoung. Koo Hui-seo sent it.”

“If we’re attacking her accounting company, wouldn’t the company card be an easy access point?”

“The administrative board apparently hired a large number of former government tax officials as well.”

“I’m sure the Jeon-gwan-ye-u [1] corruption will be severe in this field as well… Should we dig into that?”

“Maybe look into rebates [2] received and given in hard cash…”

“We can first start to search for borrowed-name accounts [3] by looking at the member’s relatives, though I don’t think they would’ve been idiotic enough to move slush funds through their husband’s accounts….”

“There’re records of transformed or remodeled businesses as well.”

“Ah, that’s because Geum Miyoung was first registered as a real-estate agent. It’s been that way even back when she was a government tax official…”

While I was staring at Seo Dawon, the other servants all gathered and continued to debate and discuss future plans.

Seo Dawon listened to the others quietly and helped me out by explaining a few terms here and there; however, he must not have noticed my furtive glances. He never turned his gaze my way. He seemed no different from usual, but somehow I thought he seemed distracted. Maybe I was just a little too sensitive…

‘Ever since Moon Issak mentioned Opera…’

The atmosphere had changed.

However, I gave up trying to infer anything from the Mage’s expressions or attitude. He’d definitely answer me, without even blinking, if I asked him about Ryu Hyerin or Opera…but would that answer truly reveal what’s on his mind?

So, I looked up [Ryu Hyerin] on my cell phone. After all, there was nothing I could do to help place Geum Miyoung's company in a tight spot…

'I'll just conduct some proper investigation into Ryu Hyerin.'

I was strangely bothered by her; anxiety puppeteered my fingers.

[An analysis of Bae Jaemin's Girl, Ryu Hyerin!]

[Ryu Hyerin has finally opened up on the 'Marriage Rumors'…Full interview with 'Feminine Sense.']

[Chosen by POxSE, the world's most influential woman…]

This year, Opera Guild's Asian fan meeting will be held in Thailand…]
4

As soon as I searched for [Ryu Hyerin] on the search engine, her profile, alongside various articles, popped up. One article was even uploaded 48 seconds ago. You could infer public interest in this woman just from the search results alone.

Her popularity was a double-edged sword for me. There was a lot of available information, but the amount available was enormous. It was almost impossible to find substantial data as countless new articles were added in the short time it took to read anything.

I tried not to look at Ryu Hyerin's personal social media accounts, but I couldn't help but click on her links after being bored with numerous trivial articles.

Her personal account was quite old, and, because of that, it contained tons of uploaded photos. The most recent picture was taken at a fine-dining restaurant. It seemed like she came alone; the photo was framed around Ryu

Hyerin and a few dishes in front of her. However, compared to other similar posts, that photo enjoyed an overwhelmingly high number of [likes].

I read the comments below.

[18,602 comments (see all)]

[tkfkdgkq1slek: I think you ate with Bae Jaemin-nim here…TT_TT]

[miyuu_kk23: Too pretty♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡]

[hyerin_f.a.n.page: ♥Love from Brazil♥]

[song322_x: That gloved hand…Who is it unni…!]

A Gloved hand, which I hadn't seen before due to the dim lighting, could be seen in the far corner of the photo; I couldn't help but imagine that hand belonged to Bae Jaemin.

'I had heard that they were embroiled in romance rumors…'

I realized that it'd been a long while since this seemingly careless and casual photo was taken and posted. In that case, did it mean that she deliberately posted a picture that captured Bae Jaemin's hand…? If it were uploaded by mistake, she would have deleted the photo immediately after seeing the comments.

'…Just what is she scheming?'

Was she simply generating entertainment as an attention seeker…? Or perhaps, was she vaguely confirming her romance after avoiding clear answers? I glared at Ryu Hyerin, who wore an elegant dress and held a flute of champagne.

A woman who suits everything perfectly…

‘Somehow…She’s similar to Seo Dawon.’

It’s like her essence was similar.

I didn’t want to needlessly hurt myself, so I didn’t go searching for pictures of Seo Dawon and Ryu Hyerin together…However, just by looking at her face alone, I felt that she harmonized well with Seo Dawon’s beauty. That is to say…I felt a strange sense of defeat despite the fact that I’ve never tried to compete with her.

‘Why did she do this?’

I was incredibly curious. Ryu Hyerin didn’t seem like someone who could betray and kill her fiance.

In addition, according to Kim Olim, Ryu Hyerin shed tears during her betrayal. Considering all that, she may have been mired in complicated circumstances that explained her behavior. Kim Olim felt angrier at the sight of those despicable tears and vowed to give Ryu Hyerin a miserable death, but…

‘Seo Dawon might want to listen to her excuses…’

After all, he once loved her. It’d be hard to cut her off completely.

My fingertips throbbed briefly; I paused before turning off the cell phone screen with a deep sigh. And, when I looked up, I met Seo Dawon’s red eyes–since when had he been staring at me?

* * *

“Hyerin-ssi?”

Ryu Hyerin turned her head to look at the woman who called out her name. Then, after reading the woman's puzzled face, Ryu Hyerin furrowed her beautiful eyes. "My goodness, I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"It's nothing! I just wanted to ask what your plans for the weekend were."

"Are you going somewhere, Joo-hui-sui?"

"Yes! I got an invitation to xxxxx…. If Hyerin-ssi has the time, perhaps you'd like to go with me."

"I'd love to. I really wanted to find a xxxx anyway."

Ryu Hyerin had missed the other's question due to a momentary lapse into deep contemplation.

Her thoughts wandered elsewhere these days; she found herself apologizing for frequent mistakes and frustrated at her distracted self. However, this wasn't the place to reveal all that, so she made sure to adopt a hurried smile and gave a cheerful reply.

Year after year she attended this elaborate social function, attended by only the most carefully selected celebrities. The attendees were all women and were all top-class, whether through family, personal ability, or wealth.

Though it seemed as if the members were simply sitting around, eating and drinking, Ryu Hyerin enjoyed access to information she could only receive here.

However, a wide knowledge pool did not translate into equal amounts of power. Rather, one may be inundated by stress from being unable to act upon that information.

For example, President Moon Sung-hak's, the President of the User's Association's, wife was in attendance today. At Ryu Hyerin's prodding, she gave hints about the current investigation into Park Hoseok's murder.

Through that, Ryu Hyerin knew, before the official announcement, that Moon Issak was the primary investigator for this case.

Ryu Hyerin had recommended another investigator–besides Moon Issak–but Chairman Moon Sung-hak had not accepted her opinion. She still didn't have enough power to exert her influence over him. When she recalled that memory, Ryu Hyerin almost grinded her teeth. She clearly had limits–a line she could not cross–without accruing suspicion.

'And, because of that…'

Moon Issak was now closing in on her biggest secret.

Become a Patron!

TL: Ahhh! I'm so excited for you all to meet Ryu Hyerin's perspective!

Footnotes

1. Jeon-gwan ye-u refers to an informal arrangement in the South Korean legal system whereby retired judges and public prosecutors who go on to become lawyers in private practice receive special treatment from their incumbent former colleagues. It's a well-known point of corruption in the legal system. Here, the Red Lotus members are saying that this sort of corruption will exist in other governmental departments (like the tax department).

2. a partial refund to someone who has paid too much money for tax, rent, or a utility.
3. Borrowed-name accounts are accounts created in someone else’s name though used by someone unrelated to the owner. It’s often used by conglomerates to create hidden funds. This is another problem in Korea–in the past decade, CJE&M has been the subject of a scandal for having hundreds of borrowed-name accounts.
4. wtf is this, an idol group???

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Chapter 220

Chapter 220

Moon Issak made suspicious movements at a party Ryu Hyerin had attended with Bae Jaemin.

Although Bae Jaemin and Moon Issak spoke to each other informally, they weren't on good terms. However, that day, Moon Issak approached them with an uncharacteristic smile. Ryu Hyerin noticed that Moon Issak wanted to speak with the Priest alone; after exchanging meaningful glances with Bae Jaemin, she rose from her seat and left them.

For about 30 minutes, Moon Issak and Bae Jaemin talked in a sitting room attached to the party hall to avoid public gaze. And, as the center of the party, Ryu Hyerin enjoyed conversing with the attending guests.

Of course, that wasn't easy work. Some uninvited guest, who she had thought would not attend, rushed up to her while she was standing in the middle of a crowd. From the moment Ryu Hyerin saw that green, short-bob hairstyle at the entrance, she covered her mouth with a delicate hand to hide her sneer and prepared herself.

The man with the short green hair finally found Ryu Hyerin. To be exact, he found her while searching for Bae jaemin and approached her with flames of anger in his eyes. "Where's the guildmaster-nim?"

"…He's talking to Moon Issak-ssi."

"Moon Issak? Why talk to a man like that?"

The man confidently demanded Bae Jaemin's presence, as if the man were searching for some luggage he had checked in with a concierge.

Ryu Hyerin had no particular desire to bring up the matter of age, but she was a year older than this man. They weren't intimate nor affectionate. However, she endured his arrogant informal speech because this man, Ahn Seo-kyung, was still useful to her and Bae Jaemin. Additionally, she had guessed why he was hostile to her.

That was to say… It would be more accurate to note that the slightest bit of sympathy and a sense of superiority kept her from dropping her faint smile. Therefore, once again, Ryu Hyerin deigned to correct Ahn Seo-kyung's arrogant way of speaking, swept her hair back, and looked towards the sitting room. "Who knows. He doesn't tell me everything."

"……" Ahn Seo-kyung's eyes followed Ryu Hyerin's gaze and found the sitting room; he immediately walked past her, lightly grazing her shoulder as he passed.

After witnessing such fierceness, the gathered guests asked Ryu Hyerin, 'Who was that rude man?' with their questioning gazes. She responded with a faint smile, stabilizing the tumultuous atmosphere.

After taking a glass of champagne from a passing server, Ryu Hyerin languidly watched Ahn Seo-kyung squabble with a bodyguard in front of the sitting-room door, in the middle of the reception hall.

Though the User in charge of Bae Jaemin's personal security was incredibly embarrassed, he eventually knocked at the door. He knew very well, as he'd worked with HaHae for a long while, that he could not let this reckless young master become his enemy.

Fortunately–fortuitously–Moon Issak left the sitting room first. Ryu Hyerin had always hated that man's snake-like eyes, so she tore her gaze away, pretending to speak to the other guests. In the meantime, Ahn Seo-kyung entered the room.

"Hyerin-ah."

”Jihye-unni.”

Kang Jihye, who always followed Ahn Seo-kyung around, had showed up half a beat late. Her personality was vastly different from Ahn Seo-kyung’s, and even Ryu Hyerin didn’t find her a chore to talk to. Easygoing, incorruptible…once she believed in someone, she had faith in them until the end…

‘Perhaps those that are ‘Knights, or Knight-affiliated,’ have straightforward personalities…’ Ryu Hyerin suddenly thought before swallowing a bitter smile. After all, she only ever knew two ‘Knights.’

When she looked at Kang Jihye, she often recalled a similar woman. For a long time, that woman would feature in her nightmares…even more than Seo Dawon…

“Excuse me… Do you know where young master Seo-kyung is?” Kang Jihye hesitantly asked Ryu Hyerin, who fell deep into futile thoughts.

Ryu Hyerin shook her head gently to shake away those bitter memories and softly responded, “He’ll be with Jaemin-ie.”

“Ahh…” Fumbling, Kang Jihye’s voice trailed off at the end of her word; she carefully observed Ryu Hyerin, trying to gauge her mood. Ryu Hyerin gave her a sweet, knowing smile.

Any close aide to Bae Jaemin would have noticed the strange vibe flowing between Ryu Hyerin and Ahn Seo-kyung–to be more exact, Ahn Seo-kyung’s one-sided hostility and ruthlessness towards Ryu Hyerin.

In any case, Ryu Hyerin knew that, in front of an honest person like Kang Jihye, rather than slandering someone, it would tug on the other’s heartstring to just laugh the offense off as if Hyerin was ignorant to his machinations.

As expected, Kang Jihye scratched at her short, sporty hair and dragged Hyerin out to the terrace. She sipped the champagne that Ryu Hyerin had handed to her as she sighed and confessed something. Jihye mostly made

excuses for the man, but, since the information concerned Ahn Seo-kyung and his father's women, the information was useful.

"Seo-kyung-ie is a bit sensitive these days." Kang Jihye started.

"Really?"

"And he hasn't been able to see guildmaster-nim often due to the Jeju Island case… The investigation has been strangely prolonged as well."

"Ahh…"

"And it seems like his uncle isn't willing to lift his hand to help this time…"

"Omo… Really?"

"We're in a difficult situation… but all we were told was to pretend to be cooperative. We're unable to do anything about the investigation at the moment."

The last people Park Hoseok met before he died were Ahn Seo-kyung and Kang Jihye. Because of that, the two were called upon by the investigative agency, day after day, and the two suffered quite tiresomely.

Despite having a firm alibi at the estimated time of death, Ahn Seo-kyung's hysteria grew daily; that man had never been 'cooperative' a day in his life, either.

'Despite all that, Executive Director Ahn won't step forward. Is that so…'

If it was to the extent where Director Ahn, who had given Ahn Seo-kyung his surname though the man was an extramarital child…and had coddled him to the point that he had developed that unpleasant personality…started saying "be cooperative"… Perceptive eyes were still observing the Jeju island case.

It was a frustrating situation, but Ryu Hyerin schooled her expression and nodded sympathetically. Kang Jihye's expression darkened, and she

knocked back all the champagne in her glass. Perhaps the woman had interpreted Ryu Hyerin's reaction as understanding and acceptance towards Ahn Seo-Kyung's rudeness.

"But, why isn't Bae Jaemin-ssi with you today?"

"He was talking to Moon Issak-ssi for a moment. Though, I think their conversation is finished now…"

"Moon Issak? How'd he get invited here?"

"…He's unexpectedly a man of many means," Ryu Hyerin said.

Kang Jihye must have also recalled Moon Issak's notorious reputation. She grimaced as she swallowed another sip, though she had been drinking the champagne like water before.

Then, after a moment of silence settled between the two, Ryu Hyerin got a system alert.

[Bae Jaemin: Come here]

Considering Kang Jihye, across from her, had no reaction, this must be a personal message from Bae Jaemin sent only to Ryu Hyerin. She swallowed a burst of laughter and pulled herself gracefully away from the wall she had been leaning against. "I'll be back in a moment."

"Mhmm." Kang Jihye waved her hand casually. Ryu Hyerin drew the curtains and made her way out of the terrace.

Though Ryu Hyerin was always conspicuous wherever she went, the long hallway alongside the terrace was only lit by tiny indicator lights on the ground, allowing her to reach the sitting room without attracting much undue attention. Perhaps the bodyguard was told of her approach in advance, unlike how he had behaved with Ahn Seo-kyung, the man politely

stepped aside. Thanks to this, Ryu Hyerin was able to quietly enter the room without being disturbed.

"…Hyerin-ah," Bae Jaemin said.

"No knocking? What's with you," Ahn Seo-kyung grumbled.

As soon as the sitting room door opened, the tangled sight of Bae Jaemin leaning against the table with Ahn Seo-kyung leaning towards him–almost on top of the Priest–unfurled before her.

It was as if the two had been kissing until just recently–Ahn Seo-kyung's cheeks flushed red. This scene was suspicious no matter how one looked at it.

Ahn Seo-kyung was briefly embarrassed, but he must have noticed how they would appear to Ryu Hyerin. He suddenly twisted and squirmed his body further onto Bae Jaemin. However, she already knew that Bae Jaemin wouldn't have touched the other at all.

'He must have begged Bae Jaemin to kiss him?'

She merely adopted a faint sneer, which only Ahn Seo-kyung could see, and quietly closed the door behind her. Ahn Seo-kyung's temper rose–his lips trembled; however, because the man had to keep up appearances in front of Bae Jaemin, he could do nothing else.

"Jaemin-ah. The President is looking for you," Ryu Hyerin softly said.

Above all, Bae Jaemin looked like he'd been saved as soon as she entered.

The Priest carefully removed Ahn Seo-kyung from his body, as if he had been waiting for those words; Ahn Seo-kyung's face paled. Ryu Hyerin greatly enjoyed the young master's fragile, wounded face. "…Ah, I apologize. I'll leave now."

"Wait, my clothes are crumpled."

Ryu Hyerin went one step further; she lightly brushed Bae Jaemin's shirt collar that Ahn Seo-kyung had been tightly squeezing. As soon as she did so, Ahn Seo-kyung's blazing glare pierced her cheeks, but Ryu Hyerin smiled brightly as if she were ignorant of all that. She then folded her arms around Bae Jaemin's elbow and pressed against his side. "Don't worry. If I'm clinging to you like this, no one will concern themselves with some wrinkled clothes."

Become a Patron!

TL: Snakes. Snakes everywhere.

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Chapter 221

Chapter 221

If glares could be heard, Ryu Hyerin's eardrums would have burst from the deafening roar by now.

However, once again, Ahn Seo-kyung could do nothing to stop Bae Jaemin and Ryu Hyerin from leaving the room together. As always, he could only glare at Ryu Hyerin, hiding his damaged pride and anger. He couldn't do anything to her, who docilely took Bae Jaemin's offered arm.

As she glanced at Ahn Seo-kyung who tried to soothe his own temper, Ryu Hyerin thought, 'A person in love is truly a fool…'

And, that thought resurfaced memories she had kept well hidden.

Although she had been unable to shamelessly express her blind love, like Ahn Seo-kyung had, she had once, in the past, been so thirsty to possess entirety of one person–desired his whole being. At that thought, intense discomfort ran through her whole body; the feeling was strong enough for her to momentarily lose control over her expressions. That memory was her biggest mistake…and the darkest blot in her history.

Those who shared her [secret] thought she had abandoned him. However, she knew. She didn't abandon him; that was her only choice other than to be rejected by him.

Still, she thought of that man often. She had never been humiliated like that ever in her life… On lonely nights, she thought of his hand…which had held hers while she woke from nightmares.

That man would never visit her unless she came to see him, but he never hung up the phone on her when she cried to him all night long. A man who would never respond to her ‘I love you’ declarations.

Still, he presented her with a small lamp to drive away her nightmares. When she slept with that lamp on, she didn’t have those detestable dreams and could sleep soundly.

’You’re saying you want to stop with this farce?’

At that time, Ryu Hyerin smiled as she asked him that. That man, Seo Dawon, didn’t answer her.

Ryu Hyerin threw the small lamp she had received from him into the trash can as soon as she returned home, but, the next morning, she wiped it clean and placed it next to her bed. However, she didn’t turn the lamp on. And, after he died, she placed it deep within her inventory and never took it out.

“…Hyerin-ah.”

Her reminiscing was broken by Bae Jaemin calling her name.

“Hm?” She said, absentmindedly.

“What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking that I’ll die by Ahn Seo-kyung’s hand if this continues?” Ryu Hyerin quickly adopted a smiling face and looked up at Bae Jaemin. Only after the Priest looked around and confirmed no one else was listening in did Bae Jaemin smile coldly, as if he were clinically detached from this situation.

After seeing his expression, Ryu Hyerin recalled that the Priest and Moon Issak had spoken before all this debacle. Quieting her voice, she asked,

“How did it go with Moon Issak?”

“Not well. I had a bad feeling ever since he called me out for a conversation, but…”

“What did he say?”

“…He asked where I had gotten my Beatrice.”

Ryu Hyerin couldn’t help but feel a chilly shock run through her body at those words. Unless the man knew something, there was no reason for Moon Issak to separately question someone of Bae Jaemin’s status like this. “What did you say?”

“I said it was a keepsake from Garam-ie… Though he didn’t seem to believe me.”

“Do you think he dug into this matter because he suspected something?”

“……” Bae Jaemin didn’t answer, but silence was as good as any spoken response. The Priest sighed deeply, “He probably has no physical evidence. I’m sure he came to see me and dig because he had none. If he had even the slightest bit of proof, he wouldn’t be here making shallow conversation at this party.”

“…Then, was he hoping to observe how we’d act while startled?”

“That could be possible… Or perhaps he’s hoping we’d focus on him while the investigation team secretly delves through our history.”

While listening to Bae Jaemin, Ryu Hyerin tried to think of someone who could obstruct Moon Issak.

Perhaps a High Priest that Moon Issak had to maintain a good image with; or perhaps a member of the board of directors for the User’s Association–someone that could give direct orders to Moon Issak’s investigation team…

Ryu Hyerin thought of all the people that she could control; she needed to use some of the cards hidden up in her sleeves. Recalling the president's secret transaction she had learned about in her last party, she whispered the details of that deal into Bae Jaemin's ear.

"I think they could tackle him by changing the investigation team's direction. There can't possibly be official investigations into the Red Lotus incident."

"The problem is, Moon Issak won't cause his fuss through official means."

"That's right… Still, it's better to have some reins on the situation than none," Ryu Hyerin said.

Bae Jaemin still muttered pessimistically, but soon seemed to accept Ryu Hyerin's words. He had no choice but to wait while trying to hinder Moon Issak as much as he could in his own capacity.

The two walked silently for a while; Bae Jaemin seemed to regain his composure, little by little. Ryu Hyerin looked at his face and fell into thought for a bit, but… Eventually, she asked him something she had been meaning to ask ever since she saw him and Ahn Seo-kyung together. "By the way, what were you doing with Ahn Seo-kyung earlier?"

"…He came onto to me one-sidedly." At the inconvenient topic, Bae Jaemin looked elsewhere, vaguely avoiding her blatant gaze.

Staring at his troubled face, Ryu Hyerin opened her mouth again, "But, why did it feel like Ahn Seo-kyung wanted to kill me when I walked in? He acted like he had just been interrupted…"

"Impossible."

"I'm not joking. You said you rejected him properly before; you didn't use me as an excuse, did you?"

"He probably noticed that I like you."

"……" Ryu Hyerin observed Bae Jaemin's face; the Priest had declared 'I like you' with such an apathetic face.

It'd been quite a while since Bae Jaemin had expressed his feelings for her. Even while Seo Dawon was alive, he had approached her without hesitation.

Because of that, she couldn't help but think of Bae Jaemin when she fell in love with Seo Dawon–so much so that the love had turned to hate. Bae Jaemin was willing to be her toy even though he knew exactly who Ryu Hyerin desired.

"Isn't Ahn Seo-kyung quite pretty? Or, it'd be fine to close your eyes and receive his advances," she said.

That was why Ryu Hyerin felt comfortable in front of Bae Jaemin. She had already shown him herself at rock bottom; she had no need to calculate and pretend in front of him as she did for others. She had no need to be courteous to him nor walk on eggshells around him, so she could say things he'd clearly detest.

As expected, Bae Jaemin immediately frowned. However, it didn't convey as much discouragement as would normally be expected when the woman he liked told him to play around with someone else that liked him instead. Rather, he seemed irritated; it was as if he were saying 'Why is today like this?' with his resigned expression.

"I like a woman who looks good in a black dress," he said shamelessly, as he glanced at the black dress Ryu Hyerin wore. The dress had a bold design that exposed her cleavage; she could have reported him for harassment at that moment.

Ryu Hyerin responded with a sly smile, "That was such a lame and perverted comment."

"Furthermore, she has to be good at making spiteful remarks."

"Are men an impossibility for you?"

“It would be possible if you were a man.” Bae Jaemin smoothly, without losing pace, wrapped one arm around Ryu Hyerin’s waist. At a surface glance, his action seemed purely romantic, but she knew Bae Jaemin was the type of man to take his arms away if Ahn Seo-Kyung were to exit the room and see them.

As if the two had shared an inside joke, Ryu Hyerin laughed. Bae Jaemin must have taken her laughter as implicit permission; he gently bit her full lips. She was a little offended that he bit her carefully painted lips, but she was able to overlook that slight as thanks for making her laugh.

“I’ll have to fix my makeup again because of you… Mmph!”

However, Bae Jaemin seemed to have been strangely stimulated by her coy eyes. Perhaps he quickly grasped that Ryu Hyerin was in a generous mood today. Bae Jaemin skillfully pushed her against the wall and pelted her with kisses.

At that moment, she remembered how she and Bae Jaemin played around like this in the Red Lotus headquarters, avoiding Seo Dawon’s gaze. However, she didn’t feel as miserable and wretched as she did then. So, when Bae Jaemin separated their lips for a moment, she wrapped her arms around his neck instead of glaring at him.

Bae Jaemin hesitated, but continued to endure her weight until her breasts fully pressed against his chest. Then, she whispered mockingly in his ear, “You’re so bad. You’re so clumsy, no matter how many times we’ve done this.”

“Why not give me chances to practice?”

She didn’t need to say who she was comparing Bae Jaemin to; the shadow that ‘man’ cast, intruding between Ryu Hyerin and the Priest, was particularly clear today. Instead of getting angry, Bae Jaemin buried his face in the nape of her neck.

At first she was so happy to see his hurt face after saying such things to him… After killing Seo Dawon, though, Bae Jaemin gained a sense of ease.

Ryu Hyerin was disappointed that she couldn't similarly be at ease. It seemed as if she was the only one still stuck, floating around aimlessly.

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TL: Honestly, one thing I appreciate about this novel…is that the antagonists (Barring a few people) are so interesting. In a way, Ryu Hyerin is so believable and sympathetic but also so detestable as well. Smh though, imagine loving someone so much you conspire to kill him. Her "relationship" with Bae Jaemin is so fascinating as well–it's hard to know what the Priest is thinking and Ryu Hyerin certainly doesn't seem to love him either. We have an intimate look into how they use each other.

Also, it's nice of her to clear up things about her and Seo Dawon's relationship. I guess there really was no love lost on Seo Dawon's side–although he was indeed kind to her.

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Chapter 222

Chapter 222

“What are you looking at?” Seo Dawon asked. I had been looking down at my cell phone for quite some time. I instinctively tried to answer with a ‘Nothing!’, but upon looking into his red eyes, felt that lying would help little.

Seo Dawon looked at me as if his eyes could peer into the depths of my soul. Trying to talk circles around that face would invite nothing but a bad mood… Eventually, I gave up and released a short sigh. “Mmm… I was looking up… Ryu Hyerin-ssi.”

“……” Contrary to what I expected, Seo Dawon’s expression didn’t change; instead, I felt a strange vibe from the other servants.

Woo Ragi glanced at Seo Dawon, who was sitting in front of me, Jung Garam folded his arms over his chest, and Choi Kyung-sik stared at me. Kim Olim simply placed her chin on her palm without saying much, but her eyes, fixated on the ground, were frighteningly chilly.

“An article?”

“Ah, well…” I stuttered.

Seo Dawon who was supposedly the one who had been the most intimate with Ryu Hyerin, simply asked me a question with a nonchalant smile. Then, he rose up and sat comfortably next to me on the sofa.

In that brief moment, I was startled by the touch of his cool skin, Seo Dawon took the cell phone out of my hands; the screen was still on Ryu Hyerin's social media page.

I was embarrassed to have been caught scrolling through her social media page after only looking at articles for about 10 seconds… However, I was curious as to how Seo Dawon would react to her feed, so I tampered down my shame.

'Just what is he thinking…'

Seo Dawon had eyes–he must have seen the comments underneath her posts.

But he left her page without scrolling further and suddenly entered my logged-in account.

Bewildered, I was speechless and could only stare at his elegant fingertips. Unrestrained, Seo Dawon started to willfully search through my [favorited posts]. "You pressed like on Kim Sangyoon's most recent post, huh?"

"N-No. That's… I just liked it out of habit…"

The mage pointed out something unexpected. In reality, I had done so because Sangyoon-ssi was someone that showed up often in my feed…

'More than that, though, since when had he paid attention to who I [liked] on social media?'

I stared blankly at him–I was at a loss for how to react in such an unexpected situation. However, Seo Dawon began to calmly leave hate comments using my account.

[Choi Lee-kyung: Even when you try you look ugly lolol]

The post featured Sangyoon-ssi’s dedicated workouts.

“W-What did you do!” I shouted.

“I just commented with my personal opinion.”

“Why did you use my account!”

“I can’t make an account since I’m dead.”

I couldn’t say anything else; it felt as if a bunch of rice cakes had been shoved into my mouth. It was pointless to argue further–how could I ask a dead person to use their own social media account…

If words didn’t work, then force would; I tried to reach out and retake my cell phone. What am I supposed to say for myself if Sangyoon-ssi were to see all this?!! I needed to stop the Mage before he left any more weird comments…!

“It hasn’t been long since you’ve recovered–aren’t you being too energetic?” Seo Dawon said.

“I-It’s because that’s my cellphone!”

The problem, though, was that Seo Dawon and I had such vastly different physiques; he could easily avoid my attempts by holding the phone high above my head.

Unwilling to give up without a fight, I swiftly pressed my upper body against Seo Dawon’s to intercept him, but I miscalculated the outcome of my actions. Unexpectedly, my hand fell in the gap between our waists, and I fell over onto him.

I swore to God that I didn’t do this on purpose; my face flushed bright red because of the Mage’s comments in that instance. In addition, when I tried to right myself, he pressed me into his embrace with one arm. Seo Dawon began to stare into my eyes while continuing to keep the cell phone out of my reach.

“Please–get rid of this arm…!”

“You’re so thin; I thought you’d be so bony… But Lee-kyung-ie is so warm and nice to the touch.” Seo Dawon calmly spouted ridiculous statements.

I hit Seo Dawon’s arm with my free hand. It did not affect him, but my arm smarted upon contact, so I gave up on escaping his hold through force.

However, it felt incredibly embarrassing to feel the other servants’ amused gazes watching us from a distance. So, in spite of my shame, I protested, “Do you think I gave myself a fever to make you feel good?! As a servant, you’re not supposed to do something like this to your master…!”

As soon as I said that, though, I felt like an otaku who was too immersed in his role as a Necromancer. Instead of pointing that out, though, Seo Dawon adopted a cheeky smile and said, “Give me a command if you dislike this so much…”

I couldn’t tell if the Mage was being sarcastic or if he was teasing me; I firmly shut my mouth. Seo Dawon used more strength to bring me further into his embrace and made a show of looking at my cellphone.

Just then, my cellphone pinged me; Seo Dawon checked the notification first. “Master-nim~ You got a DM?”

“What? Why would you even look at that! I’ve got my own private life too…!”

“Who’s this?” Seo Dawon casually showed me the DM. There, I saw the picture of a man I couldn’t forget.

[Han Kiseok]: It’s been a while. Have you been well?]

My eyes widened at the sight of an unexpected name. Seo Dawon blinked, as if he were searching through his memories, and then mumbled, “Ahh, he’s our ‘Master’s’ friend, right? The guy who stopped contacting you after whispering sweet nothings…”

“That’s… No, wait! Wait! He really sent a DM to me?!” I asked out loud in my shock. Hearing my words, Seo Dawon narrowed his eyes instead of replying to me.

I couldn’t tell what he was thinking–but the thoughts in his head definitely did not bode well for me… I looked at him, tense. With a chilly, piercing gaze, Seo Dawon asked, “No way? Are you happy?”

Those were fighting words–it was as if he were scolding some pathetic person.

“Rather than being happy…I was simply wondering…why he contacted me…” Though I felt angry, I couldn’t easily confront Seo Dawon when he adopted that sort of expression. I mumbled, as if I were making excuses for myself. Without another word, Seo Dawon entered [Han Kiseok]’s social media page. His actions were eerily similar to how I had scrolled through Ryu Hyerin’s page earlier.

To be honest, I’d checked out Han Kiseok’s personal account and the photos he uploaded a couple of times before. Though I had never once contacted him!! Nor had I ever brazenly sent him a DM, the way he did to me a few minutes ago. It was just that… whenever I got bored at dawn, or when sleep escaped me…I would look through the page…and observe how he flirted with what seemed to be a new girlfriend… That was all.

I wasn’t saying that I was proud of what I’d done…But, didn’t everyone have times where they acted a bit pathetically? Why was I fidgeting so much…?! Furthermore, it wasn’t like I’d done any of that after signing the contract with Seo Dawon. Though…that was mainly because I did not have the time or comfort to scroll through his page…

However, I thought Seo Dawon would become more vicious if I were to explain this all to him, so I kept quiet. I leaned against his still chest, unable

to hear his heartbeat.

Seo Dawon stroked my hair, as if I were some life-like doll. He muttered meaningfully, “He’s handsome.”

“……”

“He’s that friend, right?”

“…W-What are you thinking?”

“He looks like he’d appeal to Choi Lee-kyung’s taste.”

I hurriedly closed my open mouth, stopping myself from blurting out a reply. My jaws snapped shut with an incredibly loud noise and the force of the movement rattled my chin.

Just how impressive was Seo Dawon’s intuition? Though I’d silenced my tongue, it was impossible to hide all my bodily reactions.

Seo Dawon stayed still for a brief moment and then gently grasped my chin. Then, with a little force, he turned my head upwards, preventing me from avoiding his gaze. Though his touch didn’t hurt, I was startled by his aggressive behavior.

“It feels like my eardrums might burst from the sound of your heartbeats,” He said.

His voice was still gentle; he had yet to lose his smile. Yet this kind of expression was somehow creepier.

Therefore, I began to desperately deny any relation to Han Kiseok, “… We weren’t dating or anything. Really…It’s just…We were just friends for a short period of time in the past…”

“Unrequited love?”

“N-No…!” Though Seo Dawon hit the nail on the head, I shook my head hard to deny his accusation. If I were to accept the truth, there would only

be endless talk of my disorganized and muddled past. Above all, I was further motivated to deny everything due to Seo Dawon's unusual expression.

Trying to soothe the Mage, I spouted whatever excuse came to mind. "Anyway, that guy probably doesn't like me. He's not even gay…"

From Seo Dawon, who must have heard my words despite his lack of reaction, to the servants, who were observing from a distance with their arms crossed over their chest, no one took a single breath; they all stood quietly, like distinguished, noble-looking statues. An ominous silence–icy cold yet blazing–settled down in the living room.

Become a Patron!

TL: Compared to Seo Dawon's mostly distant dealings with Ryu Hyerin, it's interesting to see how he interacts with our Hamster.

But also O.O Seo Dawon, you're so salty at both Sangyoon and Han Kiseok. And like you truly only have to be salty at one of them lmao.

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Chapter 223

Chapter 223

“Cough… Um, but why do you think he contacted you?” Unexpectedly, Choi Kyung-sik helped me by slicing through the silent tension with his words. He pushed up his round glasses and looked at me.

“W-Who knows…” I couldn’t give a proper answer–I couldn’t even begin to guess at the reason.

It’s been several years since I’ve lost contact with Han Kiseok; we hadn’t talked ever since we graduated from high school. Han Kiseok became a User even before high school graduation.

At that time, public perception of Users was far better than it is now. Han Kiseok hadn’t attended school since he became a User. When he appeared at the graduation ceremony, he was surrounded by many people that looked at him with envious eyes.

I remember looking at Han Kiseok from behind, trying to search for something within him, and returning home before we could make eye contact. Since then, I’ve heard about him several times from various high school classmates…According to rumors, he had entered some famous guild and his annual salary was worth several billion won.

Afterwards, when I came across Han Kiseok’s social media, it seemed that, surprisingly, the rumors weren’t exaggerated. I knew that his family was originally well-off, but I got the sense that he had succeeded in life as a User–the stench of wealth dripped from his photos. The view of the Han

River [1] from his home; his foreign car… His guild, whose name he proudly displayed on his profile…

“He’s a member of [Trap],” Kim said.

…Just as Kim said–[Trap] was another well-known large-scale guild.

‘However…why are the servants so casually looking through my account on my phone?!’

It was annoying to see Seo Dawon scrolling through, as if my phone were his own, but I couldn’t even stop the others because I was still locked in the Mage’s arms. The other servants picked up my cell phone and began checking through Han Kiseok’s account.

“[Trap]…We weren’t at odds with that guild.”

“The top guilds all know each other anyway–we’ve all crossed the same bridge to get to the top.”

“Still, isn’t [Trap] clean?”

At the very least, Han Kiseok’s guild wasn’t one of our revenge targets. If he were part of [Virtuoso] or [Opera]… Han Kiseok might be swept up in the [Red Lotus] guild’s revenge.

Though I had no lingering regrets about Han Kiseok, I’d loathe to be a direct agent in his death. Though we had a twisted and dark past, I didn’t hate him enough to murder him…

‘Besides, I was too immature back then…’

I clung to Han Kiseok whenever I felt lonely.

I could understand how my actions may have been burdensome–his coldness and chilly attitude made some sense. We were the same age, but he always seemed more mature; I relied on him a lot…

Therefore, I was uncomfortable and nervous to see the servants look at Han Kiseok's account with fire in their eyes. I was worried that they'd try to find any pretext to cause trouble for him; moreover, I had no idea what I would say if they pressed me further on our relationship.

At that moment, Jung Garam, who had been mostly silent, suddenly spoke, "You know, this guy looks a little like Dawon-hyung."

"Don't you have eyes?" Woo Ragi rebuked bluntly.

"No, I'm not saying that they look exactly the same~ That's not it! It's like…I can see a bit of Dawon-hyung in the shape of his eyes?"

"Try to refrain from making far-fetched statements." Kim Olim said.

"Hahhh?"

Even the resident Paladin joined in, with her cool-headed tone, to refute Jung Garam's comparison.

Though it wasn't worth comparing the two, I understood what Garam-ie was saying; I had also thought that Han Kiseok and Seo Dawon were somewhat similar… Of course, it wouldn't be a good idea to step forth and confess that I thought Jung Garam was correct, so I kept my mouth firmly shut.

In the end, as the sole supporter of his claim, Garam-ie realized that his words wouldn't get through his two fellow guild members and grumbled, "Olim-noona, Ragi-hyung…you two always pretended to attack Dawon-hyung…In reality, you guys are his fans, huh. You guys want to be the only ones to insult him?"

"I'm just correcting you because your eyesight seems to be lacking. If you actually meant what you said, I recommend you get glasses."

"You're the one who says 'Hyung, hyung,' all the time–don't project. Let's stick to facts. Besides, except for his face, there's a lot to criticize. His personality is twisted, too."

Choi Kyung-sik, who sat quietly to the side, looked at Han Kiseok's selfie and glanced at Seo Dawon. "Is he saying that the structure and position of his eyes, nose, and mouth are similar…?" He mumbled.

Garam-ie expressed his dissatisfaction by placing Choi Kyung-sik–the easiest opponent–in a headlock.

Then, Seo Dawon, the object of this conversation's praise and derision, smiled arrogantly at me as soon as our eyes met.

"What's with your expression…" I grumbled.

"I just thought that Lee-kyung-ie really succeeded."

"What?"

"They're all saying I'm far better than your ex-boyfriend."

"…A-Are you crazy?!" My blood pressure rose sharply. This was the man that stayed silent when it came to the topic of dating or romantic affection–how could he so shamelessly say that? I really wanted to hit him, but my arm was still tingling. It had yet to recover from my attempts to forcefully retrieve my phone. So, I could only spout curses at him, "You really need to be humbled! You're so despicable!"

"Humbleness combined with the likes of my face? Life would be too exhausting."

"Ugh…." I wanted to sneer at the Mage, but it seemed like nothing could break Seo Dawon's armor of narcissism. He probably wouldn't even be affected if I were to say Han Kiseok was more handsome. Rather, he'd probably be sarcastic and say I needed to wear glasses…

"Why did this bastard contact you though?" Woo Ragi re-directed our focus back onto the topic of Han Kiseok's DM. I had been contemplating whether or not to pinch the Mage; that comment returned me to my senses. Seo Dawon's arrogant self-love wasn't the biggest issue.

As if she had been waiting for this change in topic, Kim Olim immediately replied, “There’s nothing that particularly stands out in his social media posts. There’s nothing strange in his message to Choi Lee-kyung either.”

“Choi Lee-kyung wouldn’t suit this insider-type guy anyway–they’re polar opposites.” Jung Garam sure was talented in infuriating others. Whose side was he on anyway? What was more upsetting was that unlike when they defended Seo Dawon’s appearance, no one stood up for me.

My cheeks flushed red. Trembling, I protested, “I just…don’t go on social media that often. I’m too lazy to post pictures…!”

“Then, you should just ask him why he contacted you.”

“Hmm, maybe it’s one of those typical greetings caused by an ex-boyfriend’s lingering emotion.”

“Isn’t it 2 am now?”

Of course, no one bought my excuses. As if my words became background noise, they began exchanging their own opinions; naturally, my temper rose.

I looked around to see if there was anything I could throw at them; my eyes met Seo Dawon’s interested eyes. “It’s your choice, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“What?”

“Whether to respond or not. I think he’s contacted you about something personal.” Seo Dawon said–it was the most logical course of action–and removed his arm that had been wrapped around my waist.

After being released from his embrace, I snatched my cell phone away from the Servants’ grasps. “From now on! Don’t! Look at my Social media! As you please! Got it?”

“……”

“……”

No one spoke–as if they had coordinated. Feeling furious once more, I retreated safely into my room. Lackey, who usually loathed to exit the room if all the servants were gathered, excitedly hung onto my back as soon as I entered.

[Clack Clack!]

–Click.

After locking the door, I took a deep breath and collapsed onto the bed, still holding my phone. As I lost my balance and fell back onto the sheets, Lackey was still attached to my back. The skeleton began to squirm, hitting my neck and my shoulders; it felt like a massage–what a filial child.

“I really only have you, Lackey…”

[Clack Clack?]

“Haah… Damn… Those punks all do as they please… Honestly, did their common sense die with them? Why go scroll through someone else’s account…”

[Clack clack clack…?]

I continued to mumble before I remembered that the servants’ ears were incredibly sensitive; I forced myself to clamp my lips shut. Then, I felt incredibly unfair–I couldn’t curse freely.

Lackey tapped me on my shoulder; I thought the skeleton was hitting me thoughtlessly, but suddenly my phone pinged me again.

[Han Kiseok: Ah, I didn’t message you for a particular reason…]

[Han Kiseok: I ran into your mother last week; I heard you also became a User.]

[Han Kiseok: I contacted you because I was curious. I’m sorry if I made you uncomfortable.]

Unexpectedly, Han Kiseok’s messages revealed his motivations.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I graduated! Woot~

Also, lmao, Seo Dawon saying “I’m better than your ex.” I can’t. The salt.

Footnotes

1. an iconic river that flows through the middle of Seoul. Rich neighborhoods often spring up at the banks of this river.

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Chapter 224

Chapter 224

‘Doesn’t he realize how we’ve drifted apart? Or, perhaps he forgot…’

Of course, there wasn’t much I wanted to say to him now. The reigning factor in why Han Kiseok and I drifted apart was how he had spread rumors and talked behind my back…

‘Although, before then, he seemed to be tired of me…’

Han Kiseok already had a clique that suited his status. Though he had somehow gotten along with me and talked with me often, he still was close with his other friends.

Furthermore, Han Kiseok would completely ignore me while he hung with his crowd. Even if he ran into me while with his friends, he didn’t even bother including me in their activities. Therefore, while Han Kiseok talked with his friends, I stood, alienated, until he called for me again.

‘And, most damningly, he’d stand at the front and tell his friends about my issues…’

And I would have to listen to that from the back of the group.

Honestly, I couldn’t remember what Han Kiseok said in detail now. It’d been so long–and I didn’t think it was that shocking that he thought of me like that.

After all, even when Han Kiseok acted kindly to me, he often belittled or acted superior to me. After that night-to-dawn moment when I had revealed all my insecurities and problems, he began to act a bit colder. There were days when he wouldn't contact me for one or two days at a time. It was as if…

…He wanted me to stop leaning on him for support.

Therefore, rather than Han Kiseok's actions, I was more shocked by his friends' reactions. Their unsurprised giggling and gossiping…it was as if they had heard him complain many times before… That was perhaps the larger contributor to my shock and sense of betrayal.

He probably wouldn't understand if I were to bring up this by-gone history. He'd probably shrug his shoulders as if he saw nothing wrong with his actions.

It would have honestly been less shocking if Han Kiseok had hit me. If he hated me–despised me–then at least he saw me as an equal. When I had begun to think of him as something between 'friend' and 'lover,' he had not even thought of me as a 'friend.' The misery I felt that day…

Even if Han Kiseok hadn't contacted me from that day on, he wasn't one to usually initiate contact in the first place.

Because we had drifted away under those conditions, I wasn't pleased that Han Kiseok had DM'd me. I thought about sending him scathing words or perhaps just ignoring him… Or, honestly, I wanted to move on from this conversation–as if nothing happened–after exchanging some superficial small talk.

In any case, I wasn't happy to see him at all. It wasn't that I haven't moved on from the events of that day, but…

'To be honest, it's still a dark blot on my personal history…'

I suppose I was embarrassed by my clumsiness and naivete. My face inadvertently heated up when I remembered how I couldn't hide my

affections and sent him notes or letters.

Han Kiseok was like a highschool diary; he probably remembered all the stupid ways I acted–things I attempted to blot out of my memory. Perhaps he thought of me from time to time. Something like…

‘In the past, I had a guy who liked me.’

Well, I suppose that would be all he’d have to say about me…

[Choi Lee-kyung: hi hi] [1]

So, after much consideration, I simply gave him a casual greeting. In reality, I wanted to ignore him…but I still had too many lingering grudges to simply ignore him.

However, it wasn’t like I wanted to receive an apology for the scars he had given me in the past. I just wanted to show Han Kiseok–in the past he had treated me like a nobody; I wanted to clearly show him that I was over him. I wanted to make him think, ‘Choi Lee-kyung must not like me anymore.’

[Choi Lee-kyung: Yah, it’s been a year since I’ve become a User lolol]

Therefore, I forced myself to sound friendly and relaxed, adding [lolol] to the end of my response.

Also, I used to have the habit of telling Han Kiseok everything that had happened to me, even before the other asked… If he remembered that, perhaps he'd feel a lack of warmth in my words.

Han Kiseok replied to me about 2 minutes later.

[Han Kiseok: I searched you up on the System network–I see you're not part of a guild yet.]

[Han Kiseok: Also you're a Necromancer?]

I was totally pissed off. "Hahhh?!!"

Han Kiseok already knew that my prospects as a User was low; he didn't even deign ignorance. My plan to pretend chicness and nonchalance was suddenly torn apart at the mention of my specifications.

It was customary for Users to enter small social guilds or medium-sized career guilds; furthermore, my class was the worst. Even ordinary people knew that Necromancer was a future-less class. Put together, Han Kiseok's two questions gained a new meaning.

[You don't have a guild…]

[And your class is the worst too… Are you able to properly feed yourself?]

It was the same as if he said that.

[Choi Lee-kyung: yeye lolol the daily routine of being in a guild just doesn’t suit me lolol]

So, even though I was trembling with fury, I tried to respond coolly. And, Han Kiseok connivingly responded with seemingly kind words.

[Han Kiseok: That’s right, lolol, particularly disciplined places are difficult to handle]

[Han Kiseok: You’re in the hub right now, right?]

[Han Kiseok: Your mom is worried because you haven’t been visiting recently.]

Then, if you consider what Han Kiseok knews about my specs, he probably meant

[You’re too ashamed to go home…]

Or, at least, that was my interpretation.

I immediately thought about the money Seo Dawon had given me and the corporate card Koo Hui-seo gave me–to spend as much as I pleased. Halfway through typing all that, I eventually deleted everything. It was money I couldn’t even brag about… I couldn’t even send more than 30 million won to my mom because I was afraid I’d get caught… Damn.

[Choi Lee-kyung: Yah, lolol, I’ve had no time because I’ve been too busy in the dungeons lolol]

[Choi Lee-kyung: I’ve been raiding 3 dungeons a week–I’m so frazzled lolololol]

Still, I tried to respond nonchalantly, roleplaying a freelancer with too much scheduled on their timetable. Then, I went overboard and even sent an emoticon of a hamster running on its wheel, squeaking [I’m busy, too busy!]. After I sent him that, I felt a bit of shame rolling through me… Who the heck even bought this emote sticker set? I bet it was Kim Olim. Damn…

[Han Kiseok: lolololol]

[Han Kiseok: I guess you’re pretty busy]

[Han Kiseok: Still, do you think you’d have the time to see me once?]

It didn’t seem that Han Kiseok was affected by my words very much. He took everything I said as truth and refreshingly countered by asking to meet–it really did seem like he had forgotten about our past.

No–he could have simply searched me out of curiosity after hearing I became a User. Now that he’d seen what horrible situation I was in, though, perhaps he wanted to ridicule me.

[Choi Lee-kyung: lololol Yeah, let’s eat out sometime lolololol]

[Han Kiseok: Do you have time this weekend?]

Han Kiseok’s desire to meet must not have been mere empty words; he tried to schedule a set time. I had no idea he’d press for a specific time; I could only hesitate and respond [The weekend?]. Han Kiseok didn’t back down.

[Han Kiseok: I don’t mind meeting in the middle of the week either.]

[Han Kiseok: I should use all my years of experiences, keke]

[Choi Lee-kyung: Well…]

[Choi Lee-kyung: Wait lolol I’ll check my schedule lolol]

[Han Kiseok: Ah, also, let’s add each other as a friend through the system.]

[Han Kiseok: SNS [2] is for common folk, not Users.]

[Choi Lee-kyung: Huh?]

[Han Kiseok: Don’t wanna?]

[Choi Lee-kyung: As if. Lolololololol]

[Choi Lee-kyung: Go-go!]

[Han Kiseok: Sent lololol]

He had even asked me to accept his [Friend Request].

For some reason, I didn’t want to back down either, so I accepted his request…. But, looking at the ‘friend’ tab on my status window–[Kim Sangyoon], [Moon Issak], [Han Kiseok]… To be honest, I felt incredibly

dismal for the future. None of those people became my ‘friend’ for genuine reasons.

In addition, while browsing through the [Friend Request] section, I was flustered to see Koo Hui-seo’s name in the ‘Waiting for Acceptance’ section. How long ago had [Koo Hui-seo] sent a request?

[Han Kiseok: hi hi]

Meanwhile, Han Kiseok left our social media DMs and greeted me over the [Friend Chat] window in the system. Even though inwardly I knew nothing good could come of this situation, I continued to talk to him. And, swept along in the flow of that conversation, we even made an appointment to see each other at the Hub this Saturday…

Eventually, our conversation finished, and I tugged at my hair. This wasn’t it! I only wanted to chicly say to him, ‘I’m not that Choi Lee-kyung who desperately clung onto you, anymore~’…

Become a Patron!

TL: Ahhh too many things to focus on

a) The fact that Lee-kyung thinks Olim downloaded cute sticker packs onto his phone is honestly so so cute.
b) My PR and I were cringing so much bc we can relate with the totally

casual–not casual at all–texts that Lee-kyung was sending.
c) Hamchi is just too relateable. Also once again his tendency to doom-think shows up–he takes everything said the worst way possible against him. Still, I don’t blame him in this particular situation.

Footnotes

1. Return of the chat speak! , consonant abbreviations for hi hi!
2. Texting through social media

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Chapter 225

Chapter 225

"What's going on?"

After contemplation, I immediately opened up the messaging service to cancel Han Kiseok and my appointment. As soon as I turned on the app, however, Seo Dawon entered the room; I impulsively hid the cellphone behind my back. Seo Dawon had a mischievous gleam in his eyes as he looked at me, but this time I looked away and avoided his gaze. I really had no intention of revealing any of this.

"No, it's just…" I murmured.

Now that I think about it, though, won't the servants also swarm along when I went to meet Han Kiseok? Honestly, what a catastrophe…

'It's better to get this over with…' [1]

Wouldn't it be better to first tell Seo Dawon how this situation came about? From what I could perceive, Seo Dawon seemed to have already noticed the nature of my relationship with Han Kiseok. Even if I hid it, I'd get caught anyway; perhaps I'd be scolded for 10 seconds less if I were to admit that this meeting couldn't be helped…

With that thought, I immediately took out my hidden cell phone. Seo Dawon simply glanced at my outstretched phone without trying to interrogate me.

‘But, even if I confessed everything… I don’t know what type of reaction he’ll have.’

It was honestly hard to imagine Seo Dawon losing his temper and releasing fiery anger. No matter how angry he may be, he always seemed to be the type to calm down and de-escalate and not the one to pursue his temper. I was intimidated by the mere thought of Seo Dawon coldly telling me, ‘Why would you do something so stupid?’

But, if he were to nonchalantly laugh and pass it off as nothing worth noting… I honestly wouldn’t feel too good about that. That meant that the Mage had no interest in who I used to like or who I was going out to meet.

‘If Seo Dawon told me he made an appointment to meet Ryu Hyerin, I would surely feel upset…’

No matter how much I observed Seo Dawon’s close face, I couldn’t predict his reaction… Eventually, I explained the situation in a small voice, as if I were confessing my wrongdoings to the Mage.

“I… This saturday… Han Kiseok and I promised to meet up.”

“Why?”

“Well…”

Seo Dawon tranquilly asked for my reasons. The question wasn’t really much, but I felt like I was suddenly at a loss for an answer; I squeezed the bed of my nails. I felt like I stayed silent for too long, so I stuttered, “I was…wondering why Han Kiseok wanted to see me… Ah, but it’s not like I have lingering feelings for him or anything! So…”

“Did you want to meet him first?”

“No! Never! It’s just… our conversation just flowed in that direction…”

“He asked to meet?”

“Mhmm…”

Contrary to my expectations, Seo Dawon did not get angry nor did he laugh light-heartedly.

He looked down at me expressionlessly, sat on my bed, and began to stare at me while maintaining eye-level position. It didn't seem like he was furious, but the atmosphere didn't feel carefree either; I kept my eyes fixed on the floor.

Then, Seo Dawon reached out to me. Surprised by the hand approaching my eyes, I flinched and pulled my head back. Eventually, though, his fingers brushed through my bangs; afterwards, I felt like I couldn't move. Seo Dawon touched my hair gently, as if he were softly stroking it.

"I thought you didn't want to see him," he said, in a calm voice. "Did you perhaps miss him?"

I wasn't usually a quick-witted person, but…at this moment, I knew I shouldn't nod. I jumped to an upright position and emphatically shook my head. "No! It's not like that at all. It's just… a matter of male pride– something like that…"

"……"

"If…you're feeling uncomfortable about this, read my DMs…"

Seo Dawon took the cell phone from my hand as soon as I finished talking. To be honest, I wanted to stop him, but I couldn't take the phone back; he was holding tightly onto that hand with his, and I had already given permission.

Despairing, I glanced at Seo Dawon who motionlessly read through Han Kiseok and my conversation.Was he going to smirk at me…? Or was he going to get angry…? But, if I thought that Seo Dawon would get angry, why was I….

'…Why am I looking forward to his reaction?'

I'd honestly be happy if the Mage were to show signs of jealousy…

Seo Dawon didn’t say much even after reading the conversation and turning off the cell phone screen. Considering the force the Mage still used to grip my hand, our discussion wasn’t at an end. “…If you don’t want to go, then just don’t go.”

To my ears–to anyone’s ears–that was a plaintive plea for me to not meet Han Kiseok; my heart started to beat. Then timidly, pretending to be caught in a dilemma, I said, “Still, a promise is a promise…”

“I think you’ll have a hard time if you go meet him.” However, the Mage said something different from what I expected. For a moment, I stared at him, unable to understand. Seo Dawon spoke again after brief silence, his words twisting and winding around the real core of his argument, “He’s someone you liked in the past, right?”

“But not right now…” Bewildered, I hurried to answer his straightforward question. However, my answer did nothing more than to affirm the Mage’s current suspicions.

Watching my face flush and heat up, Seo Dawon released a short sigh, “Just what do you want to hear from him by meeting him. It doesn’t seem like you guys parted on good terms.”

“That’s…No, how could you even know…”

“Every time Han Kiseok is mentioned, your expression…”

“……”

“Enough.” The Mage’s tone was cold, but he stroked my hair and softly fiddled with my ears. It felt like he was simultaneously embracing me and freezing me. If it weren’t for that strange dissonant vibe, I would have thought the Mage was trying to comfort me.

I looked at him in a daze–it felt like my body couldn’t figure out whether or not it was dunked into an ice pool or a hot tub. Seo Dawon, in a more acrid tone, “Well, of course he’s curious. The man that liked him became a User. But, why do you have to satisfy his curiosity?”

"……"

Seo Dawon spoke as if he clearly knew what Han Kiseok was thinking. So, after hesitating, I asked him quietly, "Do you think Han Kiseok never liked me? Not even once?"

"What?"

"Actually… I've been curious about that… For some reason, I thought I might find the answer to that question if I were to go and meet him…"

Seo Dawon opened his mouth before closing it with a slightly irritated expression.

However… These really were my true inner thoughts. No matter how stupid or foolish I may be…perhaps I could muster up some courage now that I have a chance to meet Han Kiseok. Perhaps I could ask long-held questions if I considered this meeting our last.

Han Kiseok was someone who greatly influenced my life–my romantic philosophy in particular. Even after our ill-fated parting, I had nurtured brief crushes on those similar to Han Kiseok–those that were outgoing and kind but emotionally unavailable. [2]. Those that were unexpectedly easy to get along with but were more secretive the more one dug into their lives.

So, I wanted to clarify whether or not Han Kiseok had lead me on or if I had been solely mistaken. After all, since then, I'd put brakes on any possible relationships because of this trauma.

'If he answers me… I feel like my I can put things to peace'

Who knows, maybe I'd be able to recognize signs for when I begin to fall for similar types of people. Though I liked Seo Dawon now… Honestly, Seo Dawon probably wouldn't need me anymore after his revenge and resurrection are successfully accomplished. He probably wouldn't treat me the same as he did now… He'd probably marry a woman that suited him, like Ryu Hyerin…

“What kind of delusional thoughts did you cook up…?” Seo Dawon’s words and the sound of him clicking his tongue cut through my gloomy thoughts. I had been immersed in my own imagination for a while.

I glared at Seo Dawon–another large contributor to the reason I resolved to meet Han Kiseok. To be honest, I would never have entertained the thought of actually meeting the man if it weren’t for the Mage. My own self-pity fueled my longing for a clear, definite answer.

“Why would you ask him that? If Han Kiseok liked you, he’d be living with you right now,” the Mage stated.

“……”

“And, if he did say he had liked you, what are you going to say? Are you feeling wistful?” Seo Dawon seemed incredibly mad; he attacked me like only he could.

At that moment, I felt more hateful towards the Mage than Han Kiseok. I shot back, “So, you’re saying that a person who knows I like them yet won’t date me…but still, occasionally, is kind to me is a futile prospect. Is that right?”

“That’s right. They’re just playing around with you.”

“Then, you’re the same. You also know how I feel about you, and still you won’t give me an answer! Yet, you treat me kindly–you Han Kiseok-like-bastard!” I pushed at the Mage. Lackey, watching from behind, loved this conflict so much it began bouncing around on the bed. Huffing and puffing, I glared at Seo Dawon.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: O.O There’s so much to unpack here. For one–go Lee-kyung, be direct. For another, Hamster *really* wanted Seo Dawon to react, huh? He pressed on all the Mage’s buttons. I want to upload the next chapter soon but I really don’t have good internet in this motel. I’ll probably update Monday or Tuesday, when I get back!

Footnotes

1. The original is ‘it’s better to be hit first. Aka, rip off the bandaid etc.
2. The literal translation is ” lines that cannot be crossed.” I’m localized a bit.

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Chapter 226

Chapter 226

To my chagrin, Seo Dawon was barely pushed back. However, his face, which hardened after I pushed him away, showed signs of rare bewilderment.

Seo Dawon, who looked at me with a pitiful, troubled expression–like the Mage was at his wit's end–stroked my hair. Frustrated, he said, "That's different."

"What's different?"

"……" Seo Dawon was briefly silent. Then he opened his mouth as if to say something; he tried to speak a couple of times. But, soon, he closed his mouth tightly and lowered his eyes. Rather than being lost in thought, it looked as if the Mage was anxious–like he had never been driven into a corner like this in the past.

I crossed my arms over my chest and put some force behind my gaze; this posture was almost reminiscent of the Mage's usual intimidation tactics. This time, I wasn't going to back down until I heard a proper answer.

Seo Dawon made eye contact and sighed deeply, "Han Kiseok and I have different circumstances. For one, I can't do anything in this body."

The Mage used a cheat card–His death, the fact that he was a Vengeful Ghost and a servant… Normally, one couldn't say much against these points.

However, I didn’t retreat docilely–I had endured far too much. Could Vengeful Ghosts not say they loved someone? He’s been with me for so long! “No, I’m not talking about that–your attitude…!”

“So, I know what you want to hear from me…I’m saying that I can’t say those words in my condition.”

Seo Dawon knew what I wanted to hear. As he spoke, he looked somewhat angry, though it didn’t seem like he was angry with me… It looked more like… like the Mage was restraining himself?

“Then… Don’t be kind to me from now on; just ignore me.” The problem, though, was that I was currently too incensed to care. I couldn’t control my destructive urges–I’d rather have Seo Dawon explode at me instead.

I knew my words would be clearly provocative; when Seo Dawon’s brows furrowed, I felt elated rather than scared. I hoped Seo Dawon also found all the things I had said unforgettable and concerning–I hoped he’d be unable to ignore my words. Therefore, I raised my voice and shot more verbal bullets, “Feel free to tell me how much you like me whenever you feel like it. You probably expect me to cry tears of gratitude, hm?”

“……”

“You arrogant bastard.” I reached out my hand to throw a pillow at the Mage; Seo Dawon was able to catch my arm first. We fell over onto the bed, his body crushing mine.

When I lost my balance and fell down, Lackey bit Seo Dawon’s shoulder, but the Mage simply shrugged the skeleton off. He looked down at me, motionless.

When our eyes met, my breath caught in my throat; I sensed chilling, overwhelming rage in his pupils. That was the first time I’ve ever seen such raw emotion from the Mage.

“I really wish I could ignore you too, Lee-kyung-ah.”

"……"

"But, you already know. One's heart doesn't act according to the owner's wishes."

"……"

With that said, Seo Dawon gripped my arm with more force. I trembled at the growing pressure–the ache that built in my arm; he released his strength immediately after feeling those shivers, but, still, I was pushed into the bed and unable to struggle.

Furthermore, Seo Dawon looked down at me with a numb, hair-rising gaze. At this point, I would normally have avoided his eyes, but I didn't want to retreat now.

So, I daringly glared at him even more–even as my body uncontrollably shivered.

After watching me for a while, Seo Dawon opened his mouth. "You really can't understand unless I say it out loud?"

"……"

It sounded like he wanted me to point out something we both knew.

Actually, although I didn't think our affection for each other was at the same level, I also believed that Seo Dawon had opened his heart to me to some extent. However, even after our kiss, I still felt some distance between us, and the gap did not narrow no matter how much I tried to approach him.

The Mage was the first to claim that Han Kiseok had been playing around with me; and, in the meantime, I had heard about his history with Ryu Hyerin. I was tired of the Mage's attitude–no different from Han Kiseok….

Seo Dawon: the root cause of all my anxiety and anticipation. Perhaps he read something from my expression and silence, he didn't wait for my explicit answer. "To be honest, I don't know how Han Kiseok regarded you.

There could be many explanations. However, why should I be positive about that? Maybe he wanted to meet with you to reignite a friendly relationship… Should I have said that and sent you off with a smile?"

"That's…"

"You must think I must be some pushover who'd cheer you on with your first love, hm?" Seo Dawon blatantly stared at me.

I listened to him blankly before feeling flustered. Because he sounded jealous. So, I stammered and tried to justify myself, "B-But, I have no intention of becoming intimate with Han Kiseok again! That's…You already know…Who I actually like…"

However, Seo Dawon cut me off with a wry smile, "Me? I'm dead, though, and Han Kiseok is alive."

"That doesn't matter to me."

"But it's absolutely important to me. Han Kiseok is no better than me in every aspect, but the fact that he's alive and breathing makes me inferior." Seo Dawon spouted out the last part bitterly before closing his mouth, almost as if the Mage were entrapping his emotions.

I placed a hand on his beating heart, both bewildered and conflicted.

Seo Dawon looked down at me and scolded me in a frustrated tone, "Don't be happy. Don't pity me either."

"I… I'm not."

"Then how do you explain your ear-to-ear smile?"

I closed my mouth audibly; Seo Dawon looked at me as if he were about to say something else but eventually released my hand.

As I lowered my arm, Seo Dawon looked at his hand, sighed, and turned his head away. After hesitating, I sat up, pulled Seo Dawon's head towards me again, and grasped the Mage's arm. He adopted a curt expression.

“Seo Dawon, I…” I called out to him with the intent of sharing my overflowing emotions, but, the moment I saw his ruby-red gleaming eyes, my lips kept trembling.

Seo Dawon’s sullen face seemed a little embarrassed when I stuttered and failed to speak. No, to be exact… He guessed my inner emotions by staring at my reddening face.

He opened his mouth to say something but bit his lips to hold back laughter. Naturally, his temper had cooled down; sheepishness flooded both of our countenances.

“W-Why are you laughing?!” I shouted.

“You’re making an amusing face.”

“S-Stop laughing…! I was working up the courage to say something important…!”

“Hehe…Then, say it.”

“You’re laughing, so I won’t speak.” The courage buff my overflowing emotions had given me disappeared with the sudden change in atmosphere. Somehow, I felt too embarrassed to say anything.

Seo Dawon acted like he was going to whisper something into my ear but then pulled me into his embrace. And then, while I was startled, he did breathe into my ear, raising goosebumps all along my skin. “You can’t see my face anymore, so tell me.”

“……” I pouted, and fell silent. Seo Dawon continued to nag me, although I was pretty sure he knew the reason for my silence.

“Why aren’t you speaking?”

”H-Hold still…”

“So much suspense–just what kind of amazing thing were you going to say?”

"……" Instead of talking, I hugged Seo Dawon, face-to-face, and quickly pulled at his hair. I wanted to convey to him, 'Shut up!' As expected, he closed his mouth. Really…he was reading my mind…Damn. Damn….

"So, I….Han Kiseok or whoever. Right now, I…"

"……"

"L-Like… Mpphgh!!" I gradually calmed myself down. As I tried to lay bare my emotions, something hard suddenly climbed up my back and blocked my mouth.

Seo Dawon immediately released me from his embrace and looked at the thing that had covered my mouth. I could see the Mage's expression contort in real time. "This crazy skeleton punk…"

Bam–!

Lackey wasn't the only interruption; the door suddenly opened. Jung Garam rushed in, scratching at both arms. Behind him, the other servants followed, whining and grumbling.

"Ah, goosebumps. Seriously!!!"

"Still, I wanted to hear what Choi Lee-kyung-ssi wanted to say."

"If the door hadn't opened just now, I would have torn the room apart with my echo blades. Fuck. What the hell are they doing?"

"Choi Lee-kyung. I recommend you don't be alone with Seo Dawon for the time being."

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: We got interrupted T_T But honestly, I'd be there with the servants with popcorn ready.

Also, there's a lot of things that Seo Dawon implied; plus, I think this is one of the rare times he's opened up about some of his insecurities.

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Chapter 227

Chapter 227

I burrowed my heated face in my palms and ignored them. Rather, I tried to ignore them, but Kim Olim ignored my silent pleas for the servants to drop the subject. She continued, “Seo Dawon. If you have any sort of conscience, then you should never cross that line no matter how much Choi Lee-kyung clings onto you. You fool–do you think that a relationship is constituted just by accepting those who come and go–accepting those that enter your heart yet not grasping onto the ones that leave?”

The paladin sounded irritated and conflicted.

I gave the Mage a sidelong glance. When Seo Dawon met my eyes, I dropped my gaze, but the Mage bowed his head and whispered into my ear. The whispers were loud enough for all those in the room to hear, though. “If I were alive, Olim-ie would have been charged for criminal contempt and libel.” [1]

“……”

“Well, she’s not lying–think about Sunjung-noona.” This time, Woo Ragi joined in on the conversation and mentioned someone’s name.

After a moment’s silence, Seo Dawon raised his head and smiled ominously at Woo Ragi. “Ragi-yah. How could you still hold a grudge just because a noona you liked confessed to me? So troublesome…”

Rather than flaring his temper, Woo Ragi chuckled as soon as the Mage finished speaking. “That’s right–you dated a woman who confessed to you

without thinking about your friend. Trash.”

Seo Dawon paused again. “…Did you really like her?”

In lieu of an answer, Woo Ragi raised his middle finger at the Mage. [2]

Though I wasn’t particularly fond of Woo Ragi, I somehow wanted to distance myself at least a few steps away from Seo Dawon. What the hell is wrong with his morals?

“Why are you distancing yourself?”

“……” I looked at him without responding. Seo Dawon raised his eyebrows before dragging me closer by the elbows.

Jung Garam, who sat on the bed and watched the ensuing scene with a shit-eating grin, burst into laughter. “Then this time, Ragi-hyung can steal Lee-kyung away!”

“That’s impossible. He’s so ugly that I don’t want to steal him away,” The swordsman retorted.

Hearing Woo Ragi’s rude answer, I felt no more pity for the swordsman whose love was stolen from him.

To be honest, I wanted to pat Seo Dawon’s head and praise him for a job well done. Who on earth says that someone’s ugly directly to their face? A guy has no right to be so dismissive just because they’re a bit attractive!!

Those words were even more impactful because they dropped from the lips of the most attractive man I’d ever seen. If I were to counter Woo Ragi by saying, ‘Likewise, you’re too ugly!’…He’d probably snort in disbelief.

“What’s with all the glares?”

“I’m not glaring at you.”

That guy started tantrums whenever our eyes met…

So, I held onto Seo Dawon's arm and gave a timid response. Woo Ragi looked as if he wanted to say something, but when he saw me standing close to the Mage, he pretended to vomit and began to exit the room.

"Hmmm. Anyway, back to Han Kiseok. I don't think it'd be a bad idea to meet with him once," Choi Kyung-sik said.

At the Alchemist's words, Woo Ragi stopped walking. All the other servants, including Seo Dawon, stared at Choi Kyung-sik outright. Flustered, the Alchemist fiddled with his glasses and continued, "Ah, that is… Apparently, Han Kiseok's girlfriend is Lee Hana… This person is currently working as an accountant for Geum Miyoung's company. There's a low chance…but perhaps he approached you for a deliberate reason…"

"Ah…"

"Let's just cover our bases. Also, I don't believe Han Kiseok-ssi wanted to meet up with Lee-kyung-ssi for affectionate reasons. Even if this is unrelated to Lee Hana, there probably is some other motive."

Hearing Choi Kyung-sik's objective analysis, subconscious anxiety bubbled up within me. I couldn't gain a proper lay of the current situation because of my memories and complicated feelings for Han Kiseok.

Well, I suppose if he wanted to talk about feelings, he would have contacted me earlier. As Choi Kung-sik said, it was a little uncomfortable to pass this as a coincidence when the man had denied my existence for over a year before contacting me at this moment.

"Then… should I keep our appointment?" I looked up at Seo Dawon; the mage stared back with incomprehensible eyes.

After a brief silence, he nodded, "Fine. But…Lee-kyung-ie, when I give you the signal, summon me immediately."

"Huh?"

“You don’t know Han Kiseok’s ulterior motives, right? It could be dangerous.”

“Al…Alright.”

“For the signal, I’ll touch you like this.”

“Yeah…”

With that said, Seo Dawon pressed the pattern–the contract tattoo–on my ring finger.

* * *

“Choi Lee-kyung, what on earth? Why are you preening yourself while looking in the mirror?”

“I’m just taking a quick peek while drying my hair.”

“Dawon-ie hyung, isn’t Lee-kyung-ie super anxious right now? He’s choosing to wear such nice clothes to meet another guy.”

“Ah–Come on! Stop teasing me!”

Eventually, the time for my appointment with Han Kiseok was upon us.

Today was Saturday morning. Strangely, I stayed awake until dawn, unable to sleep. When he heard the sound of my tossing and turning, Seo Dawon came and used a sleeping skill, so I was able to narrowly sleep for five hours.

I considered forgoing breakfast, washed my body, and was choosing clothes in the dressing room when Jung Garam suddenly broke in and began telling on me to Seo Dawon.

Flustered, I eventually ended up wearing a white t-shirt and jeans. To be honest, it had been a long while since I saw Han Kiseok; I didn't want to feel socially intimidated… I fiddled with my expensive clothes… For some reason, I felt like the Mage would stare at me strangely if I wore something like that…

"The clothes you wear to the convenience store would be better than what you have on right now."

"…Do I really look that shabby?"

"It sure suits your face." Wo Ragi, who had been browsing my cell phone in the living room, poured out blatant bad reviews of my fashion as he made eye contact with me. I mouthed 'You're despicable,' behind the swordsman's back. I locked gazes with Choi Kyung-sik, who was entering from the living room; he smirked and feigned ignorance for me. Embarrassed for no reason, I paced around the front door.

Meanwhile, Kim Olim gracefully walked down from the second floor, as if she had finished all her preparations. I approached her–the only person that I felt comfortable conversing with. The Paladin stopped in her tracks as soon as she saw me. "You've awoken?"

"Yeah…"

"Where are you going today?"

"We planned to meet at Libre, in the Hub's center."

The Paladin's tone made her words sound like an interrogation, but the woman's tone was originally so firm and unemotive. She turned on the cell phone as soon as I gave her the name of my destination. After reading for a few seconds, she said, "Hmm… After searching, I see that this place has been chosen by Users as the best cafe for a 'good date course.'"

"What? No! I didn't choose this location…"

“The place is structured a little improperly for us to efficiently stand on guard. The internet recommends the pretty outdoor tables, but sit indoors, preferably to the far left–the side with the emergency exit stairway.”

“…I’ll keep that in mind.”

In the meantime, Seo Dawon quietly opened the door to his room and stepped out. At a surface glance, he looked no different than usual. However, I kept observing his face, feeling nervous for no reason.

Fortunately, Seo Dawon didn’t say much, and, soon, everyone was ready to leave the house.

* * *

Perhaps Lackey was in a good mood because he was riding atop my shoulders after a very long period of being unable to do so, The skeleton kept making a strange vibrating sound with its skull. Was it humming? I grabbed its scrawny calves and shook it.

[Clack clack cla-cla-cla-clack!]

The skeleton enjoyed it, clacking away with its teeth. It felt like more Users were staring at us as we passed, but somehow their gazes weren’t as bothersome as before. To others Lackey and I were alone, but, in my perspective, I had five servants accompanying us…

‘How reliable…’

The meeting place, Libre, was a trending business not too far from where I lived; I could arrive within 20 minutes of walking.

Users on a date–lovers–occupied the cafe’s tables. Even though I deliberately arrived around 10 minutes earlier, it seemed like over 80% of the seats had been taken.

‘If all goes wrong, we might not even be able to eat here. I’ll have to grab some seats in advance…’ I thought.

“Lee-kyung-ah?”

“Yes?”

While looking for a seat next to the emergency exit stairway, as Kim Olim had recommended, a low-pitched voice suddenly called my name from behind.

It was Han Kiseok.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Enter the alleged ex-bully O.O

Footnotes

1. patently false, Dawon-ah.
2. In slang terms, flipped the bird. To those that aren’t in the know, raising your middle finger is akin to saying ‘Fuck you.’

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Chapter 228

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When he was a student, Han Kiseok had bangs that slightly covered his eyebrows and often adopted a chic, chilly expression. When one actually talked to him or hung out with him, the man was unexpectedly funny.

Furthermore, in the past, I had often seen him wearing a uniform. So, rather than welcome, I felt that he looked unfamiliar. Instead of a school uniform, he was dressed in plain but luxurious clothes… His hairstyle–with bangs brushed up–framed a soft, smiling expression… Everything went well together, but this didn't feel like the Han Kiseok I knew.

In addition, his body frame was definitely larger than I remembered. He didn't gain weight; rather, it felt like he had bulked up from exercise.

'It's really awkward.'

That guy's appearance alone drove in how much time had passed since we last met.

However, Han Kiseok didn't seem to share my sense of discomfort; he quickly approached me with a smile. Then, reaching out, he lightly shook my hand. "It's really good to see you. You didn't change at all."

"R…Really?"

He smiled kindly again; I couldn't tell if his cryptic words were a compliment or an insult. His smile had become more natural than in the

past; it seemed as if he had many good experiences under his belt. I was suddenly struck by the realization that this man had lived a good life.

‘I also should have worked out…’

By comparison, I had been working myself to the bone before I met Seo Dawon… [1] There was probably a shadow–from the hardships of life–that still lingered around the planes of my face.

I brushed my hand across my face for no discernable reason and followed Han Kiseok to the seats he had reserved in advance. It wasn’t by the emergency stairway that Kim Olim had told me about, but the seats were on a pretty, 2nd-floor terrace overlooking a panoramic view of the east side of the hub. It was rather flashy and colorful for two men, but… unable to refuse, I sat my butt down on the seat that Han Kiseok had pulled out.

“Choi Lee-kyung looks a little shy.”

“……”

“Dawon-ie hyung, what are you going to do? It seems like Lee-kyung-ie’s heart is wavering…”

The greater issue, though, were my servant bastards–they speculated on my every move while watching us from behind.

In particular, Jung Garam seemed excited as he chattered away. Instead of reacting, I kicked Garam-ie in the calf, but my foot ached as if I had kicked a wooden pole. I gave up. When I saw Jung Garam’s cheekily laugh, I had to restrain myself from wanting to punch his face.

“Would you like to order?” A waiter said.

“What would you like to eat?” Han Kiseok asked.

“Uh…… an Iced Americano for me.”

“I’ll have the same.”

Fortunately, Han Kiseok did not notice anything out of the ordinary. He simply looked at me until our drinks arrived. Then, he opened his mouth. “How have you been?”

“…Uh…” Even though I knew that I should answer properly, I couldn’t think of a good pretense, so I momentarily hesitated.

I must have looked troubled to Han Kiseok; he gave me an indulgent smile and gently said, “I’m not trying to interrogate you. I’m merely curious.”

“Ah… Well, I’ve…been well. Nothing special happened…”

“Is that your servant?”

“Huh? Yeah…”

“It looks cute.”

“……”

He looked at Lackey, the skeleton, and called it cute. In reality, Han Kiseok was the first person to tell me that Lackey was cute, so my mood was uplifted. Looking at the skeleton clinging to my side, I stroked its skull. “I-Isn’t it…? It’s like a total kid.”

[Clack clack?]

“I was a little unfamiliar with the Necromancer class, so I searched up information on it. I wondered if they dealt with ghouls or zombies.”

“Ahh… For my level, that’s a bit too much…” After speaking, I realized I probably shouldn’t needlessly emphasize my incompetence, so I trailed off at the end of my sentences.

Fortunately, Han Kiseok moved onto another subject without asking further about my stats. “It’s been a while since you became a User.”

“Hm?…I suppose? It’s been over a year, I think…”

“I thought you’d contact me during that time.”

“Ah…” At a loss due to the tone of slight disappointment, I scratched at my cheek and avoided his gaze.

At that time, Han Kiseok hadn’t given me a clear answer, but I picked up on his true feelings… From Han Kiseok’s perspective, he may have wondered why someone who had always worked hard to gain his affection wouldn’t bother to contact him. He might have even forgotten all that he had said about me. So, perhaps that was why he contacted me first…

“I’m sorry. I haven’t thought about you until you contacted me.” So, seeing no need to complicate matters, I apologized sincerely.

“……”

“The two Americanos you’ve ordered have arrived.”

“Thank you…” I said to the waiter.

However, Han Kiseok’s expression contorted strangely when he heard my apology… A little like he had slightly frozen… Of course, when our eyes met, that expression disappeared quickly.

Han Kiseok looked at me without even touching his drink; at my sidelong glance, he asked me something else, “Then, do you get along with anyone in the hub? A fixed group or something?”

“Hm?”

“You must have a party when you enter the dungeons. You don’t have a guild…”

“Ah…” After a moment’s silence, I recalled the names on my friend tab in the system. “There’s someone named Kim Sangyoon… Perhaps you know him? He’s a streamer…” I chose the most normal person on that list.

“Kim Sangyoon? Hmm… Sorry, I don’t know who he is. I don’t really watch User streams.”

“Ah, okay…”

“……”

“……”

I felt another difference that separated the past from the present; as students, the conversation didn’t feel so awkward even when we were silent. But now, there was an unbearable awkward atmosphere as silence stretched between us.

Han Kiseok must have felt the same way; he repeatedly opened and closed his mouth, trying to say something. I stirred the blameless iced americano with a straw, careful to not make eye contact with him.

“I guess he’s a celebrity that only I don’t know.” Meanwhile, Han Kiseok must have been searching the Warrior up; he was looking at his cell phone screen. I wondered what he had read, but then I saw Kim Sangyoon’s profile on the screen.

“It’s valid to not know him if you don’t watch streams. It’s only been a few months since his channel’s popularity has shot up.”

“Shot up?”

“Yeah. It hasn’t been long since his subscriber count exponentially increased… Ah! Kiseok-ie, do you want to watch him too? He often does slapstick comedy…” To overcome this silence, I hurriedly turned on my cell phone and showed him my favorite Kim Sangyoon stream clip… Han Kiseok was expressionless; it was as if he were watching some serious nature documentary.

He did not even chuckle when he saw Kim Sangyoon crumple to the ground as he was about to sit down (his chair had wheels and had moved backwards). I almost quietly laughed–the clip was still funny on a second watch…

Bashful, I hurriedly took my cell phone back from Han Kiseok's hand and muttered an excuse, "There are some folks that don't really understand his humor…"

"No, it's just… It's fascinating that you're in a fixed party with someone like him. How did you meet him?"

"Ah! That's… We got closer after Sangyoon-ssi carried me…"

"Carried you?"

"Mhmm… First, he accepted money for that service, but… Mmm… Somehow we just got closer." To be exact, we became friendly through Seo Dawon–standing behind me–instigating a slave contract through violence and intimidation. We subdued the Warrior through those tactics, but… I couldn't exactly be forthright with this explanation.

Instead, I tried to fabricate a moving story. "Sangyoon-ssi is truly a kind person… He willingly goes around the dungeons with me."

"Ah… Then, was Kim Sangyoon-ssi the one to first propose clearing dungeons together?"

"Mhmm."

"How often do you go with him?"

"About…two or three times a week?" The more I talked, the stranger Han Kiseok's expression became. As if he discovered some major plothole in my explanation, he became increasingly persistent with his questions.

"So you entered this Kim Sangyoon person's party?"

"No? We just raid together–just the two of us…"

"There's quite the level difference between the two of you. Wait–just the two of you?"

"……" It sounded like the Han Kiseok was questioning why someone like Kim Sangyoon would drag around an incompetent User like me. I crossed my arms across my chest. "Yeah. It seems like he still likes me even though I'm so incompetent."

Han Kiseok looked up with a startled expression after he heard my answer. "That's not what I meant… Normally, at your level, it's faster to raid dungeons as a party."

"…I also don't know why Kim Sangyoon prefers to raid with just the two of us."

"I apologize. This wasn't what I intended." He apologized quite neatly, but I still felt uncomfortable.

'As Choi Kyung-sik said… Did Han Kiseok meet me to fulfill some ulterior motive?'

His persistent interrogation was not what I expected from the Han Kiseok I remembered…

Furthermore, he'd listened to my situation, but he hadn't talked about himself at all. So this time, I resolved to put on an act and pretend to be interested in his life. The servants said that his girlfriend worked for a company run by Geum Miyoung, right…?

'S-So… How are you doing these days?" I asked.

"…Nothing special. Life is just travelling from job to house to job to house." Han Kiseok spoke as if he were living some joyless, boring life, but, as far as I knew, the man was a fairly successful User. Before I met Seo Dawon, if someone were to ask me to describe a fanciful User's life… I might have imagined Han Kiseok's current lifestyle.

I didn't know if the man was showcasing his humility or merely bluffing, but Han Kiseok firmly shut his mouth tight after that answer. I took note of his attitude and, in an awkward tone, asked him another question. "Mm, then… Did you meet your current girlfriend at your job?"

Han Kiseok, who had been looking down with his gaze focused on his coffee, slowly raised his head. Then, with a bewildered expression, he countered, “Girlfriend?”

“Yeah?”

“I don’t have a girlfriend?”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Me and Garam sipping tea as we watch Lee-kyung miss everything Han Kiseok wants to say and Han Kiseok cringing inside.

This kind of awkwardness is somehow delicious.

Footnotes

1. The original is ‘created porridge.’ Rice porridge requires hours of constant stirring to make sure rice doesn’t stick to the bottom of the pot. It’s slang for ‘extremely hard work.’

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Chapter 229

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Flustered, I blinked at Choi Kyung-sik, sitting across from me. Honestly, Choi Kyung-sik-ssi. Didn't you say that Han Kiseok's girlfriend worked for Geum Miyoung's company…?!

However, Choi Kyung-sik tilted his head and muttered, as if he were commenting on someone else's melodrama. "Then, are they just close friends? If you look at Lee Soo-yeon's account, her most recent photo showcases them eating and hanging out… They looked so sweet together."

'Why did you tell me this faulty data as if you were delivering certain information…?!'

I made a face at Choi Kyung-sik, asking what should be done with my eyes; Choi Kyung-sik turned his head away and avoided my gaze. In the meantime, Han Kiseok would not let this situation go and began to question me, "Why would you think I had a girlfriend?"

"That's… So… On your social media account…"

"My account?"

"Um… Lee Soo-yeon-ssi, right? You ate dinner with her… Anyway, you two looked so sweet together." I simply parroted what Choi Kyung-sik had said. I felt like I was portraying myself as a gloomy guy who had nothing better to do than to spy on Han Kiseok's social media all day. I'd already graduated from that kind of behavior…

Fortunately, Han Kiseok didn't seem to think much of my admission; he smiled softly and waved his hand. "Ah, Soo-yeon-ssi? She has a different

boyfriend. She was a hoobae [1] in my guild; we eat together occasionally.”

”R-Really?”

“Yeah… I didn’t expect you to care about that.” With that said, Han Kiseok looked strangely happy.

At that moment, Seo Dawon, behind me, suddenly pressed on my shoulders with both hands. “….!”

“What’s wrong?”

Startled, goosebumps raised all over my skin; Han Kiseok noticed my reaction and gave me a curious glance.

“Ask him why he wanted to meet you, Lee-kyung-ah,” the Mage murmured.

The mage hadn’t touched my finger–our preordained signal–yet, so I tried to stay calm and do as Seo Dawon asked. “Ah, it’s nothing. But… Excuse me.”

”Yeah?”

“I was wondering why…you wanted to meet today…”

“Uh…” Han Kiseok looked into my face for a moment before soon adopting a comfortable smile. “No particular reason… I just kept on wondering how you were doing–we lost contact after graduation.”

“R-Really? I never really heard from you…”

“I did try to contact you.”

“Me?”

“Yeah. You don’t remember…? I simply thought you changed your number.”

Jung Garam, who had been listening to Han Kiseok speak in silence, whispered, “Choi Lee-kyung, what’s this? What kind of relationship did you two have?”

‘Honestly, I have no recollection of any of this…!’

Of course, I felt wronged. I definitely would have remembered if Han Kiseok had tried to contact me before…

Then, I suddenly remembered that, right after becoming a User, I had to register my belongings before entering the Hub. I had left my cell phone with the Hub’s administrative folk.

Usually, those that had just become Users must undergo many procedures to legally obtain their ‘User’ status, including detailed physical examinations, criminal history background checks, and tax payment inquiries. In particular, communication devices, such as mobile cell phones, needed to be processed so that they may be used inside the Hub. This process was quite complicated and took a long time.

‘Did he call me during that period…?’

Even so, it’d been quite a while since our high school graduation–I didn’t wholly believe that Han Kiseok tried at all. It was just…It was clear that he was simply bored and curious today.

‘In the past, I was Han Kiseok’s way of killing time…’

I hummed evasively; Han Kiseok must also not have wanted to stay on this subject. He quickly changed the topic. “By the way, are you looking into some guilds?”

“Huh?”

“You can keep running dungeons…with Kim Sangyoon, but it’s more convenient for Users to be in guilds.”

It was beyond convenience–nowadays, guild membership was almost essential.

When one entered a guild, one could use the ‘guild dungeon,’ and gain access to raid information that fit the guild members’ levels. Therefore, the growth rate between guild members and those excluded could be akin to the distance between heaven and earth.

In addition, if one went further than the small and mid-sized realm of organizations, guilds usually signed contracts with workshops to order potions in large quantities to provide guild members with potions that are much cheaper and of higher quality than the products on the market…

Furthermore, when inter-User disputes arose, it was advantageous to belong to a large guild. The power of ‘named’ guilds couldn’t be ignored, and large guilds usually had dedicated law firms. The members received support from competent and talented lawyers to mediate cases of injury, distribution of rewards, or property disputes.

So, if a lone User had a dispute with a User affiliated with a large guild… Of course, the guild member would find himself in a privileged position.

I already knew what Han Kiseok was trying to imply–I too had seen and heard many things during the past year. In fact, after I became a User, I wanted to join a guild as well and went to many interviews. However, 80% of the time, I had been immediately turned away after my class was revealed; the rest of the time I had been rejected because my level and potential was far too low.

I tasted bitterness in my mouth as those memories welled up from within the depths of my consciousness. Still, Han Kiseok didn’t seem to be mocking me with his question; I answered him with a bitter smile, “I have been looking around…”

“Are you preparing for a guild interview?”

“Not particularly, but…”

“Then, what about my guild?” Words I could never expect tumbled out of Han Kiseok’s mouth.

I looked at him, surprised. “What? A-Are you serious?”

“Yeah. [Trap] accepts applicants without interviews if recommended by an executive.”

I was speechless for a while, too startled by what had just happened. Han Kiseok had said he’d grant me entry into a guild within the top 10 rankings–[Trap]. I couldn’t even believe that he was an executive in that guild as well. “…You’re kidding, right?”

“I mean it.”

“But… No… You’re serious? You want me in your guild? And you’re a guild exec?”

“Yeah.”

I looked blankly at him; Han Kiseok smiled and placed the Americano to his lips. A question tumbled out of my mouth, almost against my will, “You… What’s your class? How are you already an executive?”

Is Han Kiseok also a Priest…?

Han Kiseok seemed to chuckle a little when he heard my question; soon afterwards, he rubbed his eyebrows with his right hand. Then, suddenly, his right pupil turned from its original black to dozens of colors–like a sparkling prism. I flinched back, surprised.

Han Kiseok looked at me as he gave his response. “I’m a Mage.”

“I-I see.”

“Have you ever seen a Mage before? When Mages use their skills, their eyes change color according to the spells’ properties.”

“Ah… Really?”

“Well…not everyone can do that, though.”

I was acutely aware of Seo Dawon's presence while listening to Han Kiseok's words. I'd never seen the Mage's eye color change whenever he used his skills, but that may be a side-effect of his undead servant status.

'Then, back when he was alive, what color did Seo Dawon's eyes change into?'

Naturally, futile but insidiously curious thoughts wormed its way into my mind. Then, as if Seo Dawon had read my thoughts, the Mage responded quite smoothly to my unasked question. "The color effect changes depending on what skill tree the User chooses for their second class evolution."

"……"

"I think Han Kiseok chose the 'Logic' tree… Since I chose the 'Retrogade' tree, my eyes don't change color. Instead, I can make my magic circles visible."

I almost nodded, to show I understood, but I barely managed to rein in that desire and keep my head rigid. However, Seo Dawon placed his lips to my ears and whispered in a low tone, "Did you imagine it?"

"……"

"You personally wanted to see the change in my iris color?"

I clenched my fist; Han Kiseok stared at me curiously. I wanted to rub at my ticklish ears, but I endured.

Before the Mage could further interfere, I quickly asked Han Kiseok something I should have voiced earlier. "But… Why do you want me in your guild?"

"What do you mean, 'Why'?"

"So… You must know my level… Also, I'm a Necromancer… I don't think I'd be of much use to the guild."

Han Kiseok stared at me, as if I said something unexpected. To be exact…his expression betrayed his inner thoughts… Something like…

‘You unexpectedly have a firm grasp on your situation?’

Perhaps, that was what he was thinking.

I felt resentful at Han Kiseok’s expression. It felt like, inwardly, he was fishing for my rejection even though his words stated otherwise.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: *sips tea*
Hnngh the parallels. Han Kiseok is also a Mage!

Footnotes

1. Hoobae = Kohai. Aka, someone that’s younger/entered later than you in school or in the workplace.

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Chapter 230

Chapter 230

"…Besides, all you know is that I'm a Necromancer, you have no idea about my other skills or abilities…"

"That's right. I'm not looking to recruit you based on your abilities."

"…Then, what's your reason?"

Han Kiseok admitted to all the inconsistencies I had noticed refreshingly fast. Still, though he confirmed all the truths I spouted, he didn't reveal his true motivations. He only looked at me for a moment, as if he were about to say something, before turning his head away.

After a long silence, Han Kiseok finally stared at me, took a deep breath, and opened his mouth. "Actually, I was being a bit impulsive when I proposed that."

"Ah… Then you were just joking?"

"No, it wasn't a joke… Of course, I didn't really prepare this proposal in advance, but as we talked, I thought it'd be nice if you accepted my offer."

After that vague answer, we plunged into an awkward silence.

To reiterate, he asked me to join his guild on a whim, but not as a joke? It just tumbled out during the course of our conversation? But why was Han Kiseok trying to curry my favor?

The more I thought about it, the more complicated my head felt; I rubbed at my temples with the cup full of ice-diluted Americano.

The man across the table looked at me resolutely. “So… in the past…”

“……?”

“I was quite mean to you.”

I immediately raised my bowed head. Han Kiseok continued, eyes still fixed on his Americano cup. “Even after graduating high school and becoming a User, I often thought of you. I wondered how you were doing.”

“……”

“However, whenever I tried to contact you, my courage failed me.”

“……”

“For some reason, I thought you’d ignore me.” With that said, Han Kiseok raised his head. He had an incomprehensible expression on his face. “Weren’t you also curious? About my life?”

“……” Of course…I was curious.

About a month after graduation, I became curious about Han Kiseok’s situation, so as soon as I discovered his social media accounts, I secretly scrolled through them.

Whenever Han Kiseok was mentioned by classmates who kept in contact, I just couldn’t ignore these conversations and had to eavesdrop. Whenever I met those that were close to the guy, I tried to nonchalantly ask for news on his current status.

However, Han Kiseok… He was apparently living a flawless life as a User. At least, that’s what I’d heard–and that’s what he showed on social media. I thought I was the only one that was still caught up in memories of our past.

9 times out of 10, I contacted Han Kiseok first–he had never contacted me even after I stopped contacting him. He mingled freely with countless others, reveling in lighthearted freedom. It was as if he didn't feel my absence at all.

That's why I started to gradually give up. I was simply one of many satellites hovering around Han Kiseok, and the care he showed me wasn't anything special…

It was sad, but I found it easy to organize my affairs after realizing this was just futile puppy love. That's what I thought from then on. After all, if someone were to gain feelings for me, I was not beholden to return those feelings for them…It was sad to think that Han Kiseok didn't like me, but I couldn't force him to develop anything mutual.

'Perhaps, you could call this a mental victory…'

Still, after making up my mind, my mental anguish and self-flagellation over Han Kiseok had drastically diminished. I became increasingly indifferent to updates on his situation.

The idea that Han Kiseok was a User–someone who lived in a completely different world from me–helped me mentally give up on him. Shortly afterwards, I had been evaluated and received User status, but I wasn't as hung up anymore and didn't lose sleep over past regrets (though, my heart had wavered slightly).

I guess Han Kiseok shared my opinion that we both acted quite immaturely in the past.

It seemed like he was walking on eggshells while trying to figure out the best way to broach the topic of our shared history. Now that he's aged and matured, maybe he might have felt that his past behavior was too unjustifiable. Perhaps he wanted to apologize to me… Was that why he asked me to join his guild?

"Of course I was curious," I said.

“Really?”

However, his invite wasn’t an apology–it was still a selfish, self-centered action… I lowered my stiff chin and covertly sighed. I prepared to maintain a graceful attitude as I gave him my answer.

When I nodded, an eerie rush of cold air flowed towards me from Seo Dawon, who stood behind me silently. That was inevitable. Still, since Han Kiseok and I had finally met, I needed to tell him the truth in order to bring closure.

After a deep sigh, I spoke slowly to Han Kiseok, who couldn’t tear his gaze away from me. “Yeah. Because…I had feelings for you, back then.”

“Ah.”

“Don’t pretend to be ignorant now.”

“……”

“No matter–You weren’t very interested in me…” I scratched my cheek and awkwardly avoided his gaze. My blunt admittances were…honestly addressed more at my servants than Han Kiseok.

It was genuinely incredibly annoying to speak about my dark past, but… those bastards had already read my diary anyway. Besides, Han Kiseok knew that I had liked him back in high school.

I thought it would be better to take this opportunity to lay this all down, reveal all my cards, and take away their ability to tease me about this matter. Trying to stave away embarrassment, I clenched my fist and kept my head steady. I continued to speak calmly, “So, I know why you wanted to apologize… I just wanted to tell you that it’s not necessary.”

“……”

“*Cough Cough*… Isn’t it too excessive to offer me entry into your guild for an apology…?”

"……"

"Well…if you were to ask me if I was hurt, then of course–I got a lot of scars. However, that was many years in the past. I'm okay now. And… to some extent…the fact that you cared enough to make amends now has relieved my bitterness and resentment." Though I was the one speaking, I thought my words quite eloquent.

Han Kiseok, though still staring straight at me, looked lost in thought. After blatantly searching my face, he opened his mouth, "So you're saying… It's all okay now?"

"Yeah… Th-That's right. Time is…medicine. Something like that."

"……"

"Actually, if I still felt hurt…I wouldn't have come out to see you, as you've said. I would have ignored your messages… I'm honestly okay now. I'm here because I feel alright."

However, Han Kiseok didn't look convinced. On the contrary, he stared at the table. It felt as if a volatile atmosphere had settled between us–like he had been internally frowning ever since I finished speaking. The longer I spoke, the deeper that mysterious emotion set into his face, and I couldn't help but feel that I had said something wrong.

Han Kiseok kept his mouth shut, even though he seemed like he had a lot to say. After making up his mind, he looked at me. "I know it's too late to say this…but… I went to your house about a month after I became a User. I wanted to talk to you."

"Re….Really?"

"Back then, I waited but you never showed up. So, I gave up and came back home…" With that said, Han Kiseok hesitated, although he clearly had more on his mind.

Was he trying to convey to me that he had tried many times to apologize in the past, but we had never met? That he's not trying to be shameless with his apology now? …Is that it?

However, a month after Han Kiseok became a User, I had thought about Han Kiseok everyday, blaming myself for cutting contact with him. That was when my unrequited love was at its peak. So, I believed it would have been harder to organize my thoughts if we had met then. I answered Han Kiseok with a faint smile, "I'm glad we didn't meet… Back then, I also agonized over whether or not I should contact you."

"……"

"You probably never intended this, but… If we met back then…hmm… I probably wouldn't have ever gotten over you. It's probably for the best that we only met and had a conversation now."

Become a Patron!

TL: I believe, as readers, we're supposed to read this like Han Kiseok wanting to rekindle something. But man, if I were Lee-kyung and I totally understood what was happening…I might be a little pissed. Start with being a good friend first >.< But, it's really nice to get acknowledgment from Han Kiseok–that he had hurt Lee-kyung, and…I guess is remorseful? somewhat?

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Chapter 231

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When Han Kiseok heard my response, his expression gradually slid off his face. Jung Garam, sitting behind him, tried to hold back his laughter, cheeks twitching with mirth.

I stealthily glared at him; I couldn't understand why the Assassin looked so amused and joyful. I suspected that he was making funny faces at me, trying to get me to react and be labeled as a weirdo.

"Wooow… Han Kiseok-ssi… How pitiful," the Alchemist said.

"……?"

After commenting on the situation, Choi Kyung-sik gave Han Kiseok a sympathetic glance.

The Alchemist truly looked like he felt sorry for Han Kiseok, a rich and popular User and [Trap] executive. Plus, he looked alternatingly at me as well. 'Just what is so pitiful about him…? Is he saying that it's pitiful that, in the past, Han Kiseok had to deal with someone like me romantically pursuing him?'

For some reason, I felt uncomfortable; my brows furrowed. Suddenly, I heard Seo Dawon and Kim Olim conversing behind me.

"There's a timing for everything. What a satisfying look on his face."

"Right? Poor thing."

“…Han Kiseok ruined his chances–you haven’t won. Your smug expression is incredibly detestable. How repulsive.”

“The more you say that, the more I find it enjoyable though?” Seo Dawon released a low-pitched chuckle. I listened intently, unable to comprehend the flow of their conversation, but it seemed like the two had finished speaking.

“Why is everyone in the Hub gay… Ah, enough. I’m tired.” Finally, Woo Ragi muttered under his breath before snapping his mouth shut. I felt like I was the only one left in the dark.

After a long while, Han Kiseok said in a subdued tone, “Then, have you been…seeing anyone lately?”

“Huh? Ah…Mmph!” I stuttered, deeply conscious of Seo Dawon’s presence behind me. The Mage didn’t leave me alone and began caressing my ears–my ears!

I almost made a weird sound; I shook my head slightly to ask him to stop.

Seeing that, Han Kiseok asked, “You don’t have someone?”

“Huh? Ah… Well.. Something like that? Nowadays… I’m a bit busy raiding dungeons…” Wary of his gaze, I looked around. I couldn’t talk to Han Kiseok about Seo Dawon… Furthermore, it’s still a bit vague to declare that the Mage and I are dating…

However, I could feel Seo Dawon staring gloomily at me from behind after my answer. I almost turned around right then to check what expression the Mage made. What stopped me was Han Kiseok’s follow-up question.

“Aha… What about…Kim Sangyoon is it? What about him?”

“What?! Hey… Even if I like men, I don’t like every man around me.”

At my angry retort, Han Kiseok blinked before smiling again. Then, in a relaxed manner, he gently said, “Ah, I didn’t mean it in that way. I just

wanted to know what Kim Sangyoon is like."

"What? That…Um… H-He's a good guy." Feeling awkward, I hurriedly made amends and answered his question with a blushing face.

This time, though, Seo Dawon decided to throw a tantrum. He came close–almost putting his lips directly against my ears–and whispered, "What do you mean you aren't seeing anyone, Lee-kyung-ah?"

"….!"

"You're too much…"

At that statement, I flinched my shoulders, startled. Han Kiseok stared at me with a questioning expression; I smiled clumsily at him, pretending nothing was happening.

"Your ears suddenly became so red," he said.

"Huh? Ah… I-It's just… itchy." I looked at the nearby mirror on a wall; the tops of both my ears were flaming red.

I rubbed my ears a bit futilely and smiled awkwardly. Han Kiseok stared at me as if he had more to say but eventually closed his mouth.

* * *

Afterwards, unable to resist Seo Dawon's tiresome sulkiness, I stood up and told Han Kiseok I had a dinner appointment.

I became a rude person who'd booked two appointments within the same day, but that couldn't be helped. The Mage kept bothering me; the other servants washed their hands of any responsibility and sat on the sidelines.

Lackey tried to bite at the Mage several times, but, as always, the skeleton's weak strength couldn't disrupt the Mage.

Furthermore, due to this turn of events, Han Kiseok seemed to have another strange misunderstanding. He seemed to think that Lackey was a defiant servant who dared to nibble at its master.

I supposed his misunderstanding was understandable–from his perspective, the skeleton suddenly clacked for no reason, threatening his master, but… Seeing his worry, somehow I felt wronged on behalf of Lackey.

'I wanted to show him how well I lived… It's all ruined because of Seo Dawon!'

I glared at Seo Dawon, leading the way, with a resentful expression.

In the end, I felt like I failed at properly conveying 'I'm living well without you, and I don't envy your situation at all…' to Han Kiseok. I felt like I acted too foolishly during our meeting.

"Are you sure you don't want me to take you home?" Han Kiseok asked.

"Mmm… The place where I'm going next… Isn't too far from here…"

"Really? Too bad."

"Sorry… This appointment is… a bit important."

"Well… Let's just meet again another time."

"Huh?"

"Let's meet again when you're freer. When you don't have someplace else to go."

"Huh? O-Okay.."

Han Kiseok didn’t seem particularly offended. I felt flustered–he really wanted to meet next time and be able to spend time leisurely with each other.

To be honest, after getting over the fact that I no longer held any feelings for Han Kiseok, it felt awkward to see him… I didn’t really have anything to say to him. Therefore, I had no intention of meeting him again. To be frank, I wanted to avoid meeting him again.

However, how many people could coldly reject the offer to meet again directly to a person’s smiling face… Eventually, I reluctantly nodded my head, “S……Sure.”

“Do you have time this weekend?”

“Um…? Who knows… I’ll contact you after I check my schedule at home.”

“Alright.”

Because of all these underlying feelings, this conversation felt truly awkward. Back when we were students, I had always wanted to meet him and contacted him first while agonizing over the right words to message him. Han Kiseok’s regretful and disappointed face reminded me of my past self. Did I cling to the high school Han Kiseok with that expression as well?

‘Why is he like that…’

“Well then, message me when you return home,” He said.

While I was seized by this strange feeling–I couldn’t quite name this emotion–Han Kiseok finally turned around and walked away. [1] I lowered my waving hand after watching him disappear into the parking lot. Something felt out-of-sorts.

I turned my back on him. Right then, Seo Dawon suddenly grabbed my hand.

“What…!” Startled by the suddenness of it all, I tried to shake off the Mage’s hand. But, when I locked gazes with the Mage, all thoughts of resisting disappeared.

Seo Dawon’s eyes chased Han Kiseok until he disappeared before looking down at me; my heart began to strangely pound at his chilly gaze. Like that, Seo Dawon twisted his lips and laughed. “The next time?”

“……”

“Are you going to make me stand behind again as you meet with Han Kiseok next time?”

I tried to answer, but that didn’t seem to matter to Seo Dawon.

He dragged me through the alleyways between the buildings, where there was no light. I didn’t resist and meekly let myself be dragged away. However, when he pressed the inscription tattooed onto my ring finger, I paused and looked up at him. Here? Why?

However, he did not say anything more, as if nothing needed to be said. In the end, I eventually called his name. “…[Seo Dawon].”

When I summoned the Mage for the first time in a long while, I clearly felt the difference between an incorporeal vengeful ghost and someone with a body.

As a ghost, Seo Dawon was colored in a unique tone; that color visibly stood out even in the shade. However, when the Mage was summoned and his body became corporeal, that tone faded as the sun weakly shone on him. It was as if Seo Dawon had been accepted as part of the natural world…

“Lee-kyung-ah.”

“Yeah?”

However, as soon as Seo Dawon was summoned, I heard a voice–one that I wasn’t expecting to hear nor should have heard–from behind.

When I whirled around in surprise, Han Kiseok, who I thought had returned home, was standing there blankly. Though he had called for me, Han Kiseok looked past me, staring straight at Seo Dawon.

Become a Patron!

TL: As much as I want to duct-tape Woo Ragi's mouth, he's hilarious. "Why is everyone in the hub gay" lolol.

Footnotes

1. The original is basically 'a meaning that is on the verge of being caught. Like a 'word on the tip of the tongue' but for conversations. I tried to localize it, but I don't think I quite succeeded.

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Chapter 232

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I reflexively stood in front of Seo Dawon, trying to hide him from Han Kiseok. Of course, considering our physical differences, I couldn't overshadow the Mage's body; after staring at Seo Dawon for a moment, Han Kiseok was able to tear his eyes away to turn to me.

"Why are you… Did you follow me?" I asked.

"Who's that behind you?" However, Han Kiseok ignored my question and said what he wanted to say. Fortunately, it didn't seem like he recognized the Mage. If he noticed that a dead person appeared before him, he wouldn't be so perfunctorily shocked.

However, I was still nervous because the Mage's face wasn't one that you could forget after seeing. Even if we were to deny the Mage's identity now, someday in the future, Han Kiseok may search up Seo Dawon's pictures later. Therefore, I aimed to get out of this situation without saying much. I wanted to keep him from seeing the Mage's face as much as possible.

However, before I could open my mouth, I felt a hair-rising touch on the back of my neck. Seo Dawon reached out from behind, sweeping past my nape and cheek, hugged my shoulders, and pulled me into his embrace. Han Kiseok's eyes followed Seo Dawon's pale hand; it felt like his gaze alighted my skin.

"That's something I should ask you instead…" Seo Dawon answered with ease. I couldn't see the Mage's expression, but I knew from the touch at the back of my head that the Mage was half-burying his face in my hair.

I wasn’t certain, but… it felt like Seo Dawon was chuckling as he embraced me. It felt like his words took an amused lilt at the end of his sentences. Though… it didn’t seem like the Mage was laughing because he was having fun or anything.

In any case, all I could see was Han Kiseok’s expression; the man’s brows made deep furrows in the middle of his forehead.

“Who are you.” Han Kiseok pressed at Seo Dawon with an expression I had never seen on him. It was as if he was willing to call upon his skills; his irises were filling with various colors–a characteristic specific to Mages.

I wondered if he would attack Seo Dawon, but I imagined that, at that rate, he would die. Therefore, I rushed to stop him. “Wait a minute, this is…”

“You want my name? Or are you asking about mine and Lee-kyung’s relationship?” Seo Dawon said.

“……”

“It’s the latter, right?” Seo Dawon was faster than me.

Han Kiseok did not deny those words, but he shot a glare at the Mage.

I pulled at Seo Dawon’s arm, trying to telepathically convey to the Mage, ‘How are you going to fix this?’ However, Seo Dawon ignored my signal and calmly uttered something horribly astonishing. “Lee-kyung-ie is my owner, of course.”

“W…What?”

“…What did you say?”

I looked up at the Mage in surprise; he was grinning, as I had expected. He was still shameless even when I made eye contact with him.

I tried to ask Seo Dawon silently, ‘Just what on earth are you saying?!’ However, the Mage simply responded with a light kiss–a suck–on the lips.

Frozen by the surprising contact, I didn’t push him away until he languidly licked at my lips.

“…What…do you mean?” Of course Han Kiseok was shocked. I only returned to my senses after hearing Han Kiseok’s question and turned my stiff neck towards him. However, everything I wanted to say seemed to vanish; my lips could only attempt to silently mouth excuses.

Meanwhile, Seo Dawon, composed as always, began to weave a lie. “It’s exactly as you imagine.”

“……”

“I guess you didn’t know about Lee-kyung-ie’s ‘tastes’?”

I didn’t know why the word ‘tastes’ sounded so lewd. Because of that, I was momentarily stunned. Though I tried to belatedly protest… Seo Dawon’s gaze overpowered me.

Only then did I realize that Seo Dawon was in a fouler mood than I had previously thought. He looked incredibly angry, even though his eyes were still smiling–his expression was even scarier due to that dissonance.

‘W-What is it… Is he mad at me instead of Han Kiseok?’

I was bewildered, but I felt like I couldn’t pipe up in this situation. Eventually, though I felt like something was wrong, I had no choice but to keep my mouth shut.

Han Kiseok looked at me as if trying to gauge, from my expression, the validity of Seo Dawon’s words. I sneakily avoided his gaze while also trying to read Kiseok’s expression–who looked at me like I was some stranger.

“…Is that the truth?” He asked.

“……”

“You said you weren’t seeing anyone in particular.” Somehow, his tone sounded so melancholic.

Once again, Seo Dawon intercepted this question. He smiled and began to spout more ridiculous bullshit, “Lee-kyung-ie has many men. I’m just one of them.”

“What?”

“W-What are you…?!”

“It’s not so difficult for Lee-kyung to see many men at once, so…”

“……”

“So, Lee-kyung-ie doesn’t have anyone he’s dating in particular?” With that said, Seo Dawon looked down at me with a mischievous expression. I suddenly understood what the Mage was trying to say.

He was simply explaining our relationship while excluding the terms “servant” and “master”. He was simply being vague and chose words that could be misunderstood!

In the necromancer’s contract, the participants were defined as ‘master’ and ‘servant,’ so it wasn’t wrong of Seo Dawon to call me his ‘owner.’

However, Han Kiseok knew nothing of the Necromancer contract. He would never be able to understand our contractual relationship; his misunderstandings would only be amplified by this vague language.

There was no doubt that Seo Dawon was deliberately fanning the flames of delusion. Moreover, he shamelessly sent me a silent signal to join him in crafting this illusion.

I was frustrated since I couldn’t understand why we needed to deceive Han Kiseok. *Of course! *The ****great**** Seo Dawon probably has a plan that a clumsy person like me ****could never**** guess…!** [1]

‘Fine, It’s all fine, but… Was this the only way to do things?! You’re murdering my social reputation!’

I sent a silent appeal with desperate eyes, but Seo Dawon simply snorted. There were no signs of him backing down.

Eventually, I angrily clenched my fists and had no choice but to answer Han Kiseok. “…Y…Yeah.”

Seo Dawon stroked my hair, as if he were telling me I did well; at that moment, I wanted to bite the Mage’s fingers off. I finaly keenly understood why Lackey grinded its teeth every time the skeleton saw the Mage.

Han Kiseok paled at my agreement; he looked shocked. He looked at me with trembling eyes, “You’re saying what that guy is saying…is the truth?”

“…..Yeah.”

“I mean… My ‘tastes’ are… really…” My words trailed off; I couldn’t blurt out this bullshit any more. My throat choked, and I couldn’t say more. However, at the Mage’s urging, I was forced to nod my head. Han Kiseok looked me up and down, as if he couldn’t believe what he had heard.

“Lee-kyung-ie is a little kinky” Seo Dawon continued.

“……”

“He needs to see blood to get ‘release’…” Until the very end, Seo Dawon made me out to be an incurable pervert. After seeing Han Kiseok’s hands start to shake, I didn’t want to open my eyes anymore. So, with closed eyes, I forcefully pinched Seo Dawon’s arm. However, as expected, the Mage did not budge.

“By the way, Lee-kyung-ah. Are you bringing this guy into the fold too?”

“……”

“I don’t want our business to become even messier… I bet Kim Sangyoon won’t like it either.” The Mage took another step further and made a show of having a loud conversation in front of Han Kiseok.

I couldn’t endure and wanted to scream; Seo Dawon, though, cleverly pressed on my neck. Only suffocated groans left my throat. Because of that, Han Kiseok gaze colored with disgust; I couldn’t even make excuses.

“I don’t think there’s anything else I want to hear. I’ll take my leave.” Eventually, Han Kiseok turned his back on us; it felt as if I could see cold air left behind in his wake. I stared vacantly at his departing back, mouth open.

I pointed at the Mage. “Are you crazy?”

Seo Dawon covered his mouth with one hand and chuckled. Then, suddenly, he stopped laughing and dragged me closer by my chin. With downcast eyes, he whispered, “Then you shouldn’t have left him room for hope.”

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: Dang, Seo Dawon, I know you were chugging vinegar and immensely disliked Han Kiseok, but you should know by know all of Han Kiseok’s overtures went completely over Lee-kyung’s head. Lee-kyung’s starting to sass Seo Dawon a little more now too. Only in his heart…but one day I hope he’ll just outright sass the Mage.

Also, thanks for being patient you guys! I know you waited a while–the vacation was great <3 I hiked so much (and in the rain so I got sick haha). As always I have schedule up on the discord.

Footnotes

1. The sarcasm is too real and warranted haha

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Chapter 233

Chapter 233

Left him room for hope?

Dumbfounded, I slapped at the Mage's hand, but Seo Dawon didn't back down. With that said, it's not as if he explained in a way that I could understand. So, rather than to chase his delusions, I decided to focus on the reality of the situation, "Are you crazy? If Han Kiseok sees your face…"

"Then we'll just kill him." As he said that, Seo Dawon blatantly gazed–observed–my expressions.

Though I was startled by his cruel words, I didn't break eye contact or oppose the Mage. The minute I did so, I felt like he'd actually go and kill Han Kiseok. However, I firmly folded my arms accross my chest to show my dissent. "……"

"I'm kidding. Han Kiseok didn't see my face."

"……"

"You don't think I thought that far?"

As I expected–as soon as I didn't stop him, he smiled and said it was all a joke.

Though I had enough of the Mage testing me… I strangely thought that Seo Dawon was more honest than usual today. For the first time, I truly felt that he was cross with me.

‘The fact that I’m happy about that…there’s something wrong with me.’

Even as I thought that, I couldn’t stop myself from reaching out to Seo Dawon. He stopped talking and stared at me; I managed to grab his arm without any hardships.

However, now that I’ve grasped the Mage’s arm, my words disappeared. Silence formed an invisible wall between me and. the Mage.

What could I even say to make Seo Dawon feel better? I stared him in the eye before eventually releasing a small sigh, “…By the way…I’m super hungry. For the last few hours, I haven’t had anything but Ice Americano.”

“……”

“Actually, I’m not all that fond of Iced Americano. I just wanted to order something that wouldn’t take a lot of time to finish…” My stammering voice faded at the end of my sentence; the Mage continued to listen to me without doing anything.

I gave his face a sidelong glance before quickly continuing, “That is to say… I wanted to finish this conversation as fast as possible. Being with Han Kiseok was a bit uncomfortable…”

“……”

“I feel like I’ll get indigestion if I eat anything…So, what I want to say is…”

“……”

“Damn it, why aren’t you saying anything? Scold me or cheer for me or something…You said I was y-your owner right?!” Eventually, I became tired of my own anxiety and became angry. Seo Dawon turned his head away and chuckled.

Flushing red, I kicked the Mage’s shin. I kicked gently because I knew nothing I do would hurt him; my toes still tingled as if I had kicked an iron pipe. My irritation doubled.

Just then, while laughing, the Mage grabbed my shoulders and asked, in a meaningful tone, “So, you didn’t feel anything when you saw him again and wanted to go home quickly?”

How ridiculous–he was being so insistent! I exploded,”That’s right! Honestly, what’s so good about talking to Han Kiseok with all of you guys as witnesses anyway? Even if I admitted that Han Kiseok was a dark blot in my past…you’ll just make fun of me for that! You guys are awful!”

My servants, hearing my sincere complaints, grinned despicably and showed no remorse.

“Do you really think we have that much free time?”

“Don’t worry, Choi Lee-kyung. I don’t intend on teasing you with this matter. However, I’d like to inform you… Han Kiseok unfollowed you on social media, just now. I thought you should know.”

“Pffft…You know…No matter what’s in Owner-nim’s dark past… wouldn’t it already have been revealed?”

“Are you going to write about today in your diary, Owner-nim?”

“Shut up! Piss off all of you!” I wanted to grab one of them, at least, by the collar, but Seo Dawon hugged me from behind, making it difficult for me to struggle.

The mage, while hugging me, buried his face casually in my neck and giggled.

* * *

After returning home, I locked the door to my bedroom and laid down on my bed. When I returned to my senses, I was somehow eating the eggs and tomatoes Seo Dawon made for me. While ripping the dish into tiny

pieces with my fork, saw the Mage talking to Kim Olim in the living room. And, next to them, Woo Ragi was…

‘He’s honestly…so weird.’

The swordsman was doing a one-handed handstand. Jung Garam sat, lotus position, on the sofa and flipped through the TV channels. Eventually, the Assassin absentmindedly settled on some anime broadcast.

Choi Kyungsik had retired to the second floor and had not come down yet. Shortly after going upstairs, suspicious sounds echoed throughout the house and an unpleasant smell seeped forth. According to the Mage, Choi Kyung-sik planned to build his laboratory on the second floor.

The alchemist said we’d be briefly uncomfortable because of the construction, but all the noise and unpleasant smell disappeared with a small gesture from the Mage.

‘[Homunculus], huh…’

So I was free to be alone in my bedroom, eating tomatoes cut in half, and imagine what Choi Kyung-sik’s successful experiment might look like without anyone’s intervention.

‘They said that becoming a [Homunculus] will relieve some restraints of set by the servant contract… That they will be able to move independently from then on…’

Things could get even more dangerous than it already is now. Biting a fork and perching it between my teeth, I glanced towards the living room where all the other servants were gathered. Right then, I made eye contact with Woo Ragi, who calmly uprighted his body.

“What’re you looking at?” The swordsman said.

“I’m not looking at anything…”

“Do you just want to see Seo Dawon throw a tantrum again or something?”

"……" My appetite dropped because of the bullshit the swordsman spouted–and all just because we made eye contact. I laid down my fork and approached the sink, avoiding Woo Ragi's piercing glare.

Ding Dong–

At that moment, I suddenly heard the door bell ring. This late at night, the ring, echoing through the living room, sounded a bit grave. I placed down my bowl and quickly rushed to the intercom. "Who is it?"

[It's me…]

I could tell it was Koo Hui-seo from the sound of his voice.

He stood in front of the intercom camera with an insanely large bouquet of flowers that covered his upper torso. However, the man looked ill–emaciated perhaps.

Furthermore, it seems as if the veins in his left eye had burst; the whites of his eye was red. It was a bit disquieting; I couldn't tell if he had contracted some occular disease or if he was simply tired.

'I wanted to avoid meeting him at night at all costs…'

Although, that face was one I never wanted to see in the morning either…

I hesitated; Koo Hui-seo's appearance right now was the worst I've ever seen since we freed him.

"Are we running a special today where all the candidates for Lee-kyung's boyfriend are appearing?"

"I told you to shut up!"

Meanwhile, Jung Garam subconsciously muttered his inner thoughts; My temper rose, and I stared at Seo Dawon automatically. Surprisingly, he showed no outward signs of displeasure.

Seo Dawon simply looked at Koo Hui-seo through the intercom screen and nodded at me, as if telling me it was okay to open the door. After nodding, the Mage turned the ring he had worn on a finger on his right hand. With that action, the black ring transformed into a silver one.

‘Did he switch his item preset…?’

It felt like he changed his gear–as if he were preparing for a raid.

In addition, in a flash, Kim Olim stood flush to my back. She had even summoned her shield in one hand and circled me with her other–though she wasn’t touching me, it was as if I was drawn into her defensive embrace. Then, in a serious tone, she requested, “His bloodlust is extraordinary. Keep away from Koo Hui-seo.”

“What? Really?”

“Don’t worry. It’s not really aimed at you, rather… I don’t think he’s in full control of himself.”

“…I-Isn’t that even scarier?”

“It’s alright. Either way, he won’t be able to hurt you. If he tried, the contract will burst his heart and that’ll be the end.”

“Then, why do you want me to open the door?”
“If we don’t let him in, we have no idea what he’ll do out there.”

And, as soon as she finished speaking, Koo Hui-seo frighteningly opened the door and stumbled through the threshold. Naturally, Kim Olim and I closed our mouths; an awkward silence soon followed.

Even after entering the house, Koo Hui-seo kept his head bowed. The bouquet as big as his torso was placed down at his feet; he was wringing his hands and fidgeting helplessly. Somehow, it felt like he’d rush at me if I were to move an inch…The tension in the air was palpable.

That tension was broken when I heard the front door lock softly from behind Koo Hui-seo’s back. His head rapidly rose simultaneously with that

metallic click.

“Lee-kyung-ssi… It’s been a long while.” Koo Hui-seo greeted me with an awkward smile, but, soon afterwards, fat tears dropped from his eyes. He rubbed his eyes and wiped his tears with the sleeve of a luxurious, designer suit like a child; after taking his shoes off, he stepped into my home fully and left the doorway.

He staggered from the short hallway connected to the front porch to the living room, clutching the walls for support. Although I was told he was dangerous moments ago, to be honest, he didn’t look so dangerous… rather…

“Excuse me… Are you perhaps drunk?” I asked.

He looked extremely drunk.

However, as soon the words left my mouth, the Koo Hui-seo’s shadow, created by some dim, indirect light installed into the walls, swelled and rose. Though his body seemed fine, thanks to his shadow I could see that something was squirming in his back–like something was threatening to burst out.

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TL: That feel when even Woo Ragi knows Seo Dawon is throwing tantrums bc of Leekyung. Also I totally want to know what’s going on for Kyungsik to build a laboratory–how do you just build one inside a house? I bet that’s an OSHA violation lolol.

Don’t worry, we’ll revisit Dawon and Lee-kyung’s issues. We’re just also having Koo Hui-seo….in the mix…as well.

And thanks for being so patient–Have a bonus chappie!

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Chapter 234

Chapter 234

t.w. mentions of self harm

“Ah. O-Originally…I wanted to wait…Hnghh…!” As Koo Hui-seo exhaled and spoke, the tentacles reflected in the shadow grew. Perhaps he could no longer endure the pain, as he doubled over and collapsed on the spot. “Hnnngh, Hah…”

In that state, the man breathed out long wheezes and began crawling to me on his knees, whimpering. I couldn’t decide if he looked like a beggar or someone in the throes of pain.

Slither—

The bulging shadow reflected on the wall could no longer be contained by its dark borders and began to burst from Koo Hui-seo’s back, pouring forth as a mass of wriggling tentacles.

However, strangely, Koo Hui-seo’s physical body only shook violently; I couldn’t actually see any tentacles.

His clothes looked fine, and I couldn’t see blood pooling from his body. The most unusual symptom was merely the cold sweat that poured from his face–enough to drench his shirt collar.

“Are you alright?” Though I knew the man wasn’t, I still asked. Koo Hui-seo blinked a few times before looking up at me. He bit his lips hard

enough to make a mess of the lower lip; blood flowing from between the cracks.

However, he shook his head weakly. I couldn't tell if that was an 'I'm alright, don't worry about me' motion, but…

"I was going to wait, but…Unnn…" The sight of Koo Hui-seo spouting excuses as he hurriedly wiped at his tears seared itself into my brain.

"I-I'm in so much pain…Hnngh…Hurk…" He continued

"Excuse me… Could you explain what happened? Why is your shadow… No, just stay right there." I said.

"……"

I wanted to get a little closer and observe the situation, but Kim Olim firmly shook her head no. Of course, I didn't want to get too close to that strange tentacled shadow either, but I couldn't leave him in the hallway to my living room like that.

I turned to look at Seo Dawon. The mage stood idly by and simply observed Koo Hui-seo. I hesitated briefly before asking him, "Why is Hui-seo-ssi… What's happening? Do you have any idea?"

At that moment, Seo Dawon threw a frustrated glance at the Mage; though when he turned to me, that expression vanished–as if it were washed away. He shrugged his shoulders, as if nothing exceptional was happening, and replied, "When his body becomes extremely weak, his sanity becomes touch and go."

"Umm…S-So?"

"Plus, he's always been a bit off in the head… He's just worse now. Should I say he's reaped what he sowed?" With that said, he closed his mouth, as if everything had been explained.

For me though, I was even more confused after hearing the Mage. 'So, now what? He's saying that Koo Hui-seo's state is due to some mental

issues… What does he mean by ‘he’s reaped what he sowed?”

Besides, don’t most people around the afflicted person have little idea if one’s mental health is getting worse..?

I had never heard of a mental illness that manifested in crazily fluctuating shadows like that. I looked at Seo Dawon with an ambiguous smile. Though he didn’t seem to want to explain further, he reluctantly continued when we locked gazes, “…Koo Hui-seo wasn’t mentally sound when we first came across him.”

“Mhm…”

“He probably had something more serious than schizophrenia as well.”

His expression made me recall something the ex-chimera had said… He had mentioned that the “original personality” had died, unable to endure imprisonment.

‘He said that he suffered from dissociative identity disorder… And now Seo Dawon’s implying that there was something more serious at play?’

I wondered if the ex-chimera had been attacked by someone; I stared at Koo Hui-seo and asked, “What on earth happened?”

However, it wasn’t Seo Dawon or Koo Hui-seo that answered, instead it was Kim Olim who stood in my way, steadfast. “Choi Lee-kyung, did you know that Koo Hui-seo often indulged in self-harm?”

“Huh?”

“As I thought, you had no idea.”

Startled, I looked at her; the Paladin kept her gaze on Koo Hui-seo as she quietly continued, “Koo Hui-seo’s ability… gets stronger as it feeds on him.”

“What?”

“That is to say… Though his power is a strength Koo Hui-seo needs, he’s locked in a battle for dominance with it. It’s as if he’s walking a monster on a dog leash…”

“……”

“He habitually hurt himself and caused unnecessary physical deterioration of his body in such a state. It’s inevitable that his prognosis isn’t optimistic. It’s not something we can intervene in, though.” With that said, Kim Olim adopted a complicated expression as she looked at the ex-chimera, who could now hardly hold his body upright. Her gaze seemed simultaneously scornful and sympathetic.

I followed her line of sight and stared at Koo Hui-seo, who now started to twitch, back shaking, as he laid prone with elbows propped on the floor.

Despite the bizarre and gruesome movements, I wasn’t scared nor repulsed by Koo Hui-seo. Kim Olim was defending me from the front, and Seo Dawon had not come forward in active vigilance either. It would be impossible for the ex-chimera to rush at me.

Plus, he must be aware of his own state…If that was the case, why would Koo Hui-seo appear before me in this condition?

‘Honestly, if he had the time to prepare that useless flower bouquet, he should have seen a doctor or something…’

I sighed deeply, looked at the flowers sprawled across my doorway, and asked again, “Excuse me… Hui-seo-ssi. What do you need? You must have a reason for coming all this way.”

I could sense Kim Olim looking at me, but I pretended not to feel her gaze and continued to stare at the ex-chimera.

Koo Hui-seo blinked his eyes hearing my voice and raised his head. However, his left eyeball had rolled in its socket. I could only see the whites of his eyes. Startled, I was struck speechless for a brief moment. Koo Hui-

seo simply closed his eyes and then opened them; at that moment, his eyeball had rolled back into its proper place.

Slightly twitching, he said, “I-If I die…”

“…..”

“Please make me into your servant…”

“……”

“I w-wanted to ask you for that favor…Hngh…”

I’ve heard this wish from him before.

At that time, I dismissed that as more strange mutterings, but it seemed like Koo Hui-seo was being sincere back then and even now.

There was something strange about his persistence. There was an element of horror and eeriness as well, but the man looked unbearably vulnerable.

‘No way, is he going to make a suicide attempt…?’

Of course not, right? Just as I thought that, Koo Hui-seo’s clothes slipped down as he wriggled around; Terrible scars near his neck were revealed before our eyes.

It looked like he used his nails to scratch right below his neck… The sight of those deep scars and torn, exposed flesh made me speechless. I couldn’t understand how he could abuse himself so horribly…

Squeeze–!

Just then, the tentacles that erupted from Koo Hui-seo’s shadow burst through his back and suddenly began to attack him. They rode upwards, winding up his torso like a flexible snake, and began strangling his neck.

“Cough…! Co-ough.” Koo Hui-seo soundlessly opened and closed his mouth, as if he were about to say something to me. However, he could only cough as the tentacle wrapped around his neck, strangling him. He struggled and tried to use his hands to relieve the pressure–that soon turned into Koo Hui-seo scratching at his own body.

“That’s not self-harm…” Shocked by that sight, I inadvertently stepped closer to Koo Hui-seo.

Of course, Kim Olim stopped me immediately. She held me back and spoke firmly, “Don’t go near him. There’s nothing we can do except wait until he gets it under control.”

“But…” I protested; if we left him like that, Koo Hui-seo might really die. However, it didn’t seem like Kim Olim understood those feelings.

Left with no other choice, I turned to Seo Dawon. I knew he had no compassion for the man, but he might do me a favor… I looked at him with anticipatory eyes.

Seo Dawon slightly furrowed his brows–he must have understood my desires. With a pleading smile, I requested, “Seo Dawon, I’m sorry… But, couldn’t you help him once? We just need to do something about that shadow…”

“Shadow?” Seo Dawon adopted a strange expression. He looked quizzical before his face soon frowned severely, “Choi Lee-kyung, what do you see?”

“Huh?” I blinked my eyes, unable to determine how I should respond. It wasn’t just the Mage; all the Servants’ moods quickly changed.

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TL: There’s definitely something shady going on with Koo Hui-seo–things that obviously Seo Dawon and Kim Olim can’t see or ignorant of. After all, to an unseeing eye, his scratches might look like self harm.

But D: There is some eldritch-horror thing going in on here.

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Chapter 235

Chapter 235

"Why?"

"……" Seo Dawon didn't respond.

Kim Olim began to place some strength in the hand holding me back. I was so surprised by the pain that my body flinched. "Nngh…! Why are you guys doing this?"

Kim Olim only let me go after I groaned. However, the atmosphere still seemed eerie; the expressions of the servants watching us seemed rigid. Jung Garam's normally grinning expression had been erased, and the Assassin slowly stood up from the sofa. "Why does it keep getting worse?"

"Huh?"

"Choi Lee-kyung might become a cripple at this rate…" At first, I wondered if Jung Garam was speaking to me, but it seemed like he was talking to himself.

However, his last sentence was quite creepy, so I couldn't help but interrogate him further, "What does that mean?"

"……"

However, everyone clammed up at my question synchronically. Seo Dawon, who was standing behind me, came close, "How much can you see?"

“What?”

“The thing around Koo Hui-seo… how much of it can you see?”

Though I was nervous, I turned my gaze back onto Koo Hui-seo as the Mage requested.

In that short while, Koo Hui-seo had been temporarily released from those tentacles. To be exact, the tentacles appeared to be torturing the ex-chimera rather than simply attacking him. It strangled the man and released him momentarily, when Koo Hui-seo struggled to escape, it repeated the process all over again…

However, the tentacles still only existed within the shadows; in the physical realm, it seemed as if Koo Hui-seo was struggling on his own. I hesitated, unable to figure out what was happening before me, but Seo Dawon placed his hand on my shoulder, as if to urge me to answer. So, I explained exactly what I saw, “The shadow…looks a little strange. I can’t actually properly see anything, but it looks as if tentacles within his shadow are harassing Koo Hui-seo…”

“And smell?”

“Smell?”

“Doesn’t it smell strange?”

“I… no.”

I didn’t really…smell anything in particular. I could only smell the subtle scent of the diffuser that Choi Kyung-sik had made after he joined. To be exact, I could only smell the gentle, soft smell of cut grass.

I sniffed hard and turned to the Mage, who was patiently waiting for my answer, “I can only…smell the diffuser.”

“……” Seo Dawon’s expression didn’t lighten. He frowned–like a doctor looking at a patient whose body was failing them–before quickly

hiding his grimace when he saw my anxious eyes. However, he had more to say, “If by any chance you smell blood…”

“Hm?”

“Or the stench of a rotting corpse, tell me immediately.”

“Ah, alright.”

As soon as he heard my response, the Mage reached out to Koo Hui-seo.

While we talked, Koo Hui-seo was unable to endure the pain and drooped onto the floor, unconscious. The tentacles were still pressing on his body, but I could only see its movements through the shadow on the wall. In the real world, Koo Hui-seo seemed to have collapsed, alone.

However, as Seo Dawon reached out to the tentacles, as if he were about to use a skill, the tentacles flinched; they raised their languid bodies sharply. Because of that, Koo Hui-seo’s body flung onto its side, as if he had been kicked. That sight was somehow disturbing.

“[Lightning Globus].” Seo Dawon activated his skill as soon as Koo Hui-seo’s body moved.

Soon, a golden magic circle rose around Koo Hui-seo; when it faded away, an electrifying black current appeared in its place, slowly forming into a round sphere. It was only as big as a ping-pong ball, but, every few seconds, it made a threatening crackling noise. If one were to touch it, they might be electrified.

Perhaps the tentacles had a degree of intelligence; they began to hover around the skill, shirking back at each threatening zap. They didn’t touch the skill recklessly; like a snail’s eye stalk, the tentacles cautiously reached out before shirking back without evening grazing past the sphere. As a result, the tentacles naturally shrinked in overall mass.

However, the black tentacles were still weighing down Koo Hui-seo’s body. I had no idea how much they weighed, but Koo Hui-seo’s face, below

that mass, was so pale that I thought he would choke if we left him to his own devices.

“I don’t…think he’s breathing,” I said.

“…[Levitate].” Upon hearing my mumbles, Seo Dawon released a short sigh and floated Koo Hui-seo’s body about 5 centimeters off the ground.

The tentacles, busily shaking in the shadows, began to wrap around Koo Hui-seo’s torso and knot around every joint. Like they were carefully packaging the man up.

The mass didn’t try to escape nor vanish; Koo Hui-seo was still unconscious. I thought the tentacles’ behavior was an ominous sign. Watching those tentacles tie themselves around Koo Hui-seo’s elbows, I asked the Mage, “Why are they doing that?”

“……” Seo Dawon looked wordless down at me. When I returned his gaze, wondering why the Mage was silent, he answered, “What are they doing?”

“Huh?”

“I can’t see anything.”

Startled, I looked into the Mage’s eyes. Couldn’t they see Koo Hui-seo’s tentacles before? Seo Dawon gave me a serious look before suddenly stroking my eyelids. “I simply guessed at the location, following your gaze, and used one of my skills.”

“What?”

“My skill is unable to hit anything and is just hovering around.”

At those words, I looked back in Koo Hui-seo’s direction. There were definitely threatening spheres floating near the tentacles, like drones, but they were indeed doing nothing else. I turned back to the Mage, “But you’ve seen those tentacles before!”

“At that time, Koo Hui-seo consciously manifested them.”

“What…? But…”

“Right now, Koo Hui-seo isn’t controlling them.”

“Then… Why can I see them?”

“……” It felt like Seo Dawon had some guesses as to this situation but did not answer. I had an ominous feeling.

At that moment, the tentacles’ behavior took a strange turn. Koo Hui-seo, who had been surrounded by the tentacles, suddenly rose to his feet.

I realized then that the tentacles had merged into five very long and thick tentacles. Those five thick, stem-like tentacles intertwined behind Koo Hui-seo’s back, like long ribbons, and were permeating into Koo Hui-seo’s back.

At that moment, something that appeared to be a black hand popped out of his back. As I watched, I almost screamed in astonishment. Seo Dawon attentively looked at me before holding my hand.

C-c-crunch–

One of Koo Hui-seo’s arms twisted in an unnatural direction. To be exact, his right elbow fully bent in a way that it shouldn’t. I was mesmerized by that gruesome scene and could only watch, dumbfounded.

The ex-chimera moved unnaturally, as if he had become a doll puppeteered by strings. Perhaps the tentacles were trying to remedy the ‘accident’ that had just occurred; one tentacle slithered up to his right arm… It tried to return the elbow to its original angle, but, understandably, the elbow’s angle still seemed strange. The bones had already been smashed after all.

In that state, Koo Hui-seo opened one eye–the bloodshot left eye that I had been worried about since earlier. For the first time, I saw *‘it.‘*

"…. Hui-seo-ssi." Though I called the ex-chimera's name, I was sure that *'that'* wasn't Hui-seo. That unidentified being, who stared at me, seemed to have no intention of hiding it wasn't Koo Hui-seo.

Furthermore, the numerous shadow tentacles disappeared when that man opened his eyes.

At that moment, Seo Dawon said to me, "Summon me, Lee-kyung-ah."

"Huh?"

Seo Dawon didn't say anything further and stared at 'that.' Though I wanted to hear an explanation, I soon smelled a horrible scent and had to stop talking. "Nngh… What is this…smell…"

"…What?" Seo Dawon looked at me as soon as I spoke. I felt like I was going to choke on this unfamiliar scent–one of the worst things I have ever smelled in my life. Waves of unpleasantness wafted over me, again and again; it was as if I was being dunked in sewage water. It was so terrible that I couldn't even open my eyes.

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TL: The image of the tentacles breaking bones and trying to puppet the limbs back into their original positions…but failing… D:

Ugh. Gross!

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Chapter 236

Chapter 236

“Seo Dawon. This time, I think it’s better for me to step forward.” Kim Olim, who had been quietly monitoring the situation, said suddenly. Seo Dawon didn’t answer but didn’t retreat either. Kim Olim came to my side– she had more on her mind. “Seo Dawon was summoned earlier today, there won’t be much time left in his summoning time limit,” she said to me.

“……”

She pinpointed something I hadn’t thought much about–the summon time.

I raised my head, still covering my nose to block the agonizing scent. Seo Dawon frowned at the Paladin, but he didn’t refute her words. It seemed like the summon time limit also weighed on his mind.

However, the Mage didn’t back down easily and held onto my nape. I felt like I could finally breathe again–the odor felt weaker.

‘Did Seo Dawon do something?’

Though it became much easier to breathe, the fishy scent of blood still lingered in the air. Whatever took over Koo Hui-seo’s body was still keeping an eye on me.

’That’ had been staring at me all this while without blinking once; the fact that such a thing was less than two meters away was giving me

considerable mental stress. Even though I was surrounded by all the servants, this was still a horror-like situation.

Seo Dawon shook his head, as if he had weighed his decision in this short moment. “We can just suppress him quickly.”

“If we do it your way, Koo Hui-seo won’t be able to walk anymore. Choi Lee-kyung probably doesn’t want that?”

“……”

“Don’t be anxious. This isn’t like you.” At Kim Olim’s cool-headed words, the Mage eventually nodded and stood back. Kim Olim spread her arms wide as soon as he retreated; black gloves soon formed over her white hands. While I awkwardly hesitated behind her, she said, “Summon me, Necromancer.”

“…[Kim Olim].”

As soon as I called her name, her ebony black hair began to flutter.

Kim Olim slowly faded into existence, starting from her head to toe; she closed her eyes and recited some short chant throughout her summoning. Finally, she ended by drawing a holy sign across her chest with her gloved hands.

When she finished signing, ‘*its*‘ gaze moved from me for the first time. ‘*It*‘ seemed to have noticed Kim Olim just now; the heels of her combat boots made a clacking noise against the living room floor as soon as she manifested and dropped into reality. ‘*It*‘ opened its mouth, revealing a void full of black things, lacking tongue or teeth.

“The rot inside you must be vibrating,” she said.

When bundles of black tentacles began to pour down from ‘*its*‘ mouth, Kim Olim’s eyebrows twitched once before she jumped high from her standing position.

“Eeek!” On the other hand, I screamed and retreated a few steps; Seo Dawon pulled on my arms to drag me into his embrace. The tentacles that flowed out of ‘*its*‘ mouth quickly crawled across the living room walls and floor and approached Kim Olim, who was hanging from the second-floor railing. She somersaulted and landed on the sofa before stretching her arm out to the side.

“[Night Pall],” she shouted to activate her skill. A dazzling light poured down over her gloved hand, and soon she was holding a round silver shield.

The shield’s surface was inscribed with delicate details. 12 round decorative elements were littered along the rim of the shield; each decoration had illegible symbols engraved inside. The side-profile of a goddess that had become the tree of life was drawn onto the center of the shield.

She had summoned her most powerful weapon, the divine vessel [Rho-Aias]. [1] With shield in hand, Kim Olim charged straight to the cluster of tentacles. Her attack was so reckless, she had destroyed the back of the sofa that she had used as a stepping stone.

Bang–!

“[Ah-Ah-Ah-Ah-Ah-.]” Koo Hui-seo…or, rather, the unidentified monster with Koo Hui-seo’s appearance…was thrown onto the island table in the kitchen, smashing it, after ‘it’ was hit by the Paladin’s shield. Even though thick tentacles were used as a defensive shell, they did not seem to fully absorb the impact of the hit. For dozens of seconds, the monster stopped moving, as if it were too injured to move straight away.

I stared intently at the debris of smashed furniture as I hastily asked the Mage, “By the way, will Koo Hui-seo be okay? He’s not broken somewhere?”

“I’d prefer if that were the case.”

“What?”

As soon as we finished speaking, Kim Olim quickly bent backwards; she had avoided something that zipped by, making soundwaves as it passed by. It was far too fast for my eyes to identify it.

Crash–!

Because she avoided the attack, the large TV in the living room behind her had shattered. Soon afterwards, Kim Olim furrowed her brows and quickly tilted her head to the side; simultaneously, something black narrowly grazed past her hair. As that happened, a chandelier hanging from the ceiling crashed on top of the Paladin.

"Get out of the way!" I shouted inadvertently. However, Kim Olim didn't avoid the chandelier. To be exact, she couldn't really avoid it because Koo Hui-seo's crazy tentacles held her ankles to the floor. When I saw that, I automatically tried to jump towards her.

"Calm down."

At least… I would have jumped towards her if Seo Dawon hadn't dissuaded me. Contrary to my agitation, Seo Dawon and Kim Olim didn't appear to be concerned. It was as if they had expected all of this.

The Paladin quickly lifted [Rho-Aias] over her head and smacked the falling chandelier, which shattered in pieces around her as crystal met metal.

Following that, the Paladin cleaved the tentacle holding her ankle to the ground with the edge of her shield. Her face was calm, as if she had not just been attacked.

"[Kya-ah-ah-ah!]"

A scream from within the kitchen, where Koo Hui-seo was stuck, erupted through the house. The tentacle was cleanly cut off; the portion that had been holding Olim's ankle was now wriggling around like a hose with a strong water current running through it. The Paladin simply wiped the blood that splattered onto her eyes away and immediately raised her shield again.

Plop–!

Then, she cut off another tentacle which attacked her from behind. After seeing that, I realized that the shield could be as sharp as any weapon depending on its wielder.

Tentacles were usually blunt rather than pointy, so they usually specialized in choking and crushing their opponents. However, no matter how fast they moved, they couldn't hold onto Kim Olim; luckily, they were powerless in the face of her [Rho-Aias].

Eventually, the three surviving tentacles writhed back and retreated from the Paladin. She slowly walked out of the blood-soaked living room, her heels clacking against the floor. "Is that it?"

"[……]" The sound of the strange, panting breaths that filled the living room was ominously cut off by Kim Olim's words. I couldn't take my eyes of the wreckage that had once been a kitchen. Somehow I felt that, as soon as I looked away, something would pop out from there.

However, 'that' didn't move–it seemed like it was holding its breath as well. Kim Olim placed her shield, that had been dripping black blood, on the ground next to her.

Thump–!

The resulting heavy sound made me wonder how heavy that thing was; the marble floor under the shield had been smashed and ruined. Kim Olim observed the place where 'it' was located before turning back to me. "Go back a few more steps."

"O-Okay…"

"Don't step on any shadows."

"Alright… Gah!"

Seo Dawon, perhaps following Kim Olim's request for my protection, lifted me up into the air. I was forced to cling to his neck as my legs

suddenly dangled midair. ‘

“……!” Just then, the lights on the porch blew out. I flinched in surprise at the broken lights; neither the Mage nor the Paladin moved at all. However, the dim lights in the front hallway, leading from the door to the living room, also darkened.

“…Huh?”

“Why?” I mumbled…

Then, even the light stands built at the entrance of the living room were extinguished.

I felt chills and looked out at the darkened, almost invisible front hallway. Usually, even if the light went out, there’d be light on the other side; vague shapes would be dimly revealed despite the darkness. But, because all the lights had been turned off, one by one, nothing was visible no matter how wide I opened my eyes.

I turned back to the Mage in order to relay that information. “Did you see that? All the lights from there to here extinguished…”

However, I couldn’t finish speaking due to shock. Seo Dawon, who had been holding me, now sported a face that was blackened, as if it were painted with darkness.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I said it before, I’ll say it again. I’m down bad for Kim Olim.

Footnotes

1. In Greek mythology, Rho Aias was the shield used by the hero Aias during the Trojan War. It was a bronze shield covered by seven layers of ox hide, and the only thing that proved capable of stopping the javelin of the great hero of Troy, Hector.

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Chapter 237

Chapter 237

There were people whose brains go blank and their body goes rigid in the face of something frightful and horrific.

I didn’t know it before, but it seemed like I was one of those people. I couldn’t even scream or think of getting away from him; I could only foolishly stare into his disappeared face.

However, soon, the black void of a face approached closer; my frozen rigidity soon released. Unable to think about anything else, I pushed at his arms to gain distance.

“[……!]”

Seo Dawon’s body hurried to grab me. I couldn’t hear what he was saying–only noise.

However, Seo Dawon’s arms, which would not have been moved away easily under normal circumstances with my strength, had released my body without resisting.

“What! What on… What on earth is going on?!” I tried to go towards one of the other servants on standby nearby, but all of them had their heads turned away from me. Their bodies stood tall and rigid. That strange silence and bleak atmosphere was so ominous and weird. I couldn’t bring myself to approach them and faltered backwards.

Pop–!

At the same time, it sounded like the fuse had gone out; all the lights in the house turned off simultaneously.

Soon, the deep darkness swept over me like a wave; in the blink of an eye, my vision had been blocked. At the same time, the gruesome scent of blood thickened. Barely holding back my nausea, I clung to the wall and whispered, “[Kim Olim]…!”

Since Kim Olim was already summoned, I thought I could resolve things by calling her to my side.

However… Though I could see the Paladin’s back by the dim, natural light shining through the living room window, she did not turn towards me. After that, it seemed as if even her silhouette was swallowed by the darkness and I couldn’t be sure if she was still there or not.

I instinctively felt that something was wrong. I didn’t only call for her anymore and tried other servants’ names as well. “[Seo Dawon], [Kim Olim], [Jung Garam]…!”

“……”

“I-Is there no one there? Lackey!”

“……”

“Lackey! No one? Is there really no one there?!”

“…..”

“What on earth…!”

“……”

“[Woo Ragi]…! Is there no one?!”

However, Kim Olim, Seo Dawon, and even Jung Garam… No servant answered me.

To be exact, since all the lights had been extinguished, I could feel nor perceive no signs of their presence. It was as if everyone had vanished from this world as all light had disappeared.

It wasn't just the servants–Koo Hui-seo's presence had also vanished. It felt like I was the only one left in this world. All I could hear, in this pitch black void was the sound of my own anxious gasps.

Just before I lost my rationality to desperate fright, I suddenly felt a rough force pulling me by my collar from behind. Startled, I almost screamed, but the unexpectedly harsh force strangled my throat so I could only cough out groans.

"Hey. Get a hold of yourself."

"Cough…" I almost fainted, but, when I heard a familiar voice, I nearly cried in relief.

Full of anticipation, I raised my head and identified the person that pulled at me. As expected, the owner of that fierce and rude voice was Woo Ragi. He pulled me back and scrutinized my face.

He frowned his brows and adjusted my collar several times–like a clean freak–but the force of his grasp did eventually soften. I looked at him with a face laden with indescribable relief mixed with fear; Woo Ragi frowned, as if he were burdened by my reaction.

This vague, uneasy silence ended when my eyes slightly overflowed and lukewarm tears dripped down my cheeks. Woo Ragi looked into my eyes with a chilly expression and shook away his hands that had been grabbing onto my collar, as if he were throwing me away.

With his strength no longer holding me up, I fell straight onto my butt. "Nngh…"

"Agh, so frustrating… Why'd you call my name?"

"…W-What did you say?"

“You should have just kept calling for Seo Dawon…”

“W-What are you talking about… What did I do…”

Woo Ragi’s attitude seemed to imply that I was the cause of this strange turn of events; however, he didn’t explain further. Still, he didn’t take his watchful eyes off me and seemed to be waiting for me to stand up.

As soon as I noticed that he was waiting, I placed some strength in my thighs. However, I couldn’t stand up. “H-Huh? Why…”

“……”

I tried to stand up, but I felt incredibly dizzy; cold sweat continued to flow down my temples. Stumbling, I collapsed to my feet a few times before I accidentally brushed my hands against Woo Ragi’s feet. Well, that wasn’t necessarily so alarming or embarrassing, but…

…The issue was Woo Ragi’s subsequent behavior. He immediately pulled the front of his boots away, as if he had stepped in some dog poop. Then, he tapped me on the back of my hand. I could divine some strong feelings of distaste and ‘get away from me,’ from his body language. Honestly, did this bastard practice humiliation tactics all day or something?

“……”

“Stop being absurd and get up. Do you think I’m Seo Dawon? You think I’d bite, suck, hug, and carry you like him?”

In a fit of anger, I clenched my fist and pressed it against Woo Ragi’s shoes. The swordsman must not have expected that action; he squatted in front of me with a smile on his face. Of course, that grin was incredibly fierce. “You wanna die?”

“I…can’t…stand up, okay?”

”So?”

I felt humiliated, but my physical condition was getting worse as the minutes went by– beggars couldn't be choosers. [1] In the end, I futilely jutted my chin out, hoping to look a little brazen. "I think… you'll need to…give me a piggyback ride."

Of course, I didn't think Woo Ragi would docilely give me his back. However, even as I spat out these words, my vision kept growing dark; I was falling in and out of consciousness. Additionally, I began to feel colder and colder.

'Beggars can't be choosers…'

Honestly, how did I get into a situation where I must cling onto Woo Ragi.

And Woo Ragi… Wouldn't he be here to rescue me? I was sure he was expecting me to beg him, but I calculated that he wouldn't reject my plea in the end. That was why I expected his ridicule and yet shamelessly demanded things from him. For him to support me.

"Oh~ Is that how our Choi Lee-kyung-ssi gives orders to men?" …How could you ask me to carry a guy like you on my back…? You don't think I notice how you stare blankly at my face whenever you get the opportunity?" However, Woo Ragi sank my hopes. Blood began to pool in my cheeks, and I flushed red–this was a sensation I had felt too many times before. Although, I didn't know if Woo Ragi noticed my current plight…

I wanted to die for a brief moment, but I couldn't change what had already occurred. Now that I was being pushed away by the swordsman, it wasn't like I could crawl on four legs to his side. Because of that, I begged, "I won't stare at you from now on…"

"You really stared at me?" Woo Ragi had a rare expression of bewilderment adorning his face. Soon, his smile adopted a grumpy tinge.

'Was that a trap..?' Being tricked doubled my embarrassment, but, surprisingly, Woo Ragi shut his mouth without ridiculing me further. Then, he held out one hand to me, as if he were allowing me to grasp it.

But, just before I held on, he–as if he needed to make a point–blurted out, “Don’t forget that you asked for us to touch first, okay?”

Alongside those mutters, he grumbled under his breath further. Those actions really resembled Seo Dawon–at some point, close friends begin to really act like one another. I smiled inwardly; in the end, I had to say something, “…I just asked you to support me, alright?”

“If you wriggle around unpleasantly, you’ll have to live the rest of your life as a one-armed man.”

Honestly, he just said whatever he wanted to say.

I nodded; I knew that none of my words would get to him anyway. With that, I grabbed his outstretched hand.

“Haah!” As soon as my fingers touched his, Woo Ragi dragged me to my feet with one hand.

At that point, my arm felt like it would be ripped out of its sockets, but I could endure that pain. However, my face hit his chest so hard that I could see stars in front of my eyes.

I grabbed my throbbing nose and looked up; I could see the swordsman’s chin. If he had dragged me into his embrace a little harder, my nose would have bled. He definitely did that on purpose. I glared in protest, but, before I could curse at him, my eyes began to tear up first.

Woo Ragi looked down at me and gently brushed a cowlick behind my ears. I shrank back at the unexpected action.

He whispered into my ears, “Homo-bastard, the fact that I’m doing this is an honor.”

His sneer was crammed full of arrogance.

Become a Patron!

TL: Strap in tight ya’ll. We’re going on a Woo Ragi adventure. This is the start of our new arc <3 (and I think there’s some interesting revelations in store)

Footnotes

1. the original saying is ‘can’t afford to choose between cold and hot rice.’

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Chapter 238

Chapter 238

Woo Ragi leaned my body against his and then carried me on his shoulders as if he were hauling a bag of flour. Thanks to this, the pit of my stomach pressed against the edges of his shoulders. I felt bile rise up– beyond feeling upset, I felt like I was going to vomit.

“W-Wait a minute!” I struggled, trying to get him to fix his posture… Suddenly I heard a sharp clap and my butt began to throb. My eyes opened wide, stunned.

“Do you want to die? Your butt is touching my face.” Woo Ragi, this crazy bastard, just slapped my ass with his palm!

We’re the same age! [1]

Humiliation and shame bubbled up within me; I grabbed at Woo Ragi’s hair with all my might, as if I were pulling weeds. Blinded by anger, I couldn’t see anything else.

Woo Ragi slowly turned his head and glared at me, “Are you crazy? Just where are you hitting!?”

“That’s my line–are you crazy?!”

When I said that, Woo Ragi glared at my wrist. My emotions, which rose with my momentary lapse of reason, quickly cooled down in the face of his harsh eyes.

However, I was still frustrated and annoyed. As I released strength from my fingers still grabbing at his hair, the bastard irritatedly shook his head and gripped my side harder. Eventually, I couldn't endure and clung to the swordsman's neck.

"Tsk, I told you to take your hands off of me," Woo Ragi said.

"I feel like I'm about to vomit…! Honestly!"

"If you throw up, I'll 'actually' kill you."

"……" Instead of answering, I buried my face into the crook of his neck. At that moment, Woo Ragi stopped walking and spouted a few curse words. Fortunately, though, he fixed his carrying posture. It seems he hated the feel of my burrowing into his embrace more than he loved inconveniencing me. That fact was annoying, but he moved cautiously, taking care to not brush against me. At least I didn't feel uncomfortable anymore.

However, even as I was carried in Woo Ragi's arms, my condition continued to deteriorate. Earlier, I had thought I felt sick because of the pressure on my stomach, but the nausea had gotten worse.

Eventually, I grabbed his arm and barely managed to open my mouth, "W-Wait…"

Woo Ragi didn't answer, but hurriedly threw me to the ground when we made eye contact–he must have seen something in my eyes. Lying there, I threw up everything I had recently eaten. "Urgh…."

It was painful enough that teardrops began falling from my eyes.

However, Woo Ragi, who I thought would stay far far away, strode closer. Embarrassed and still feeling nauseous, I tried to scooch away. However, Woo Ragi's hands were faster than mine.

"…Hey." He wiped the vomit off the corners of my mouth. He showed me his hand… Unexpectedly, it wasn't gastric juices or food scraps that had clung to the sides of my lips.

It was vivid blood.

I was even more surprised than Woo Ragi. I opened my eyes wide and stared back at the spot I had thrown up: darkened blood. Bewildered, I raised my head. “It’s blood…”

“You…” Woo Ragi said something, but, strangely, the floor began to spin around me… Soon, I closed my eyes and collapsed. Someone caught me before I hit the ground, but I couldn’t remember anything after that.

* * *

When I opened my eyes again, my body was shaking at regular intervals. After a few more minutes just intaking my current situation, I realized I was on someone’s back.

I frowned and looked around; I remembered that the last person I was with was Woo Ragi. All I could see, though, was darkness enveloping me.

I had no idea how much time had passed. However, judging from my physical condition, it felt like I had rested on his back for at least two to three hours.

The fact that Woo Ragi had continued to carry me on his back this entire time was proof that we were no longer inside my home. No matter how large my new home may be, it’s not so complex nor spacious enough that he’d stumble around in this darkness for hours while giving me a piggy-back ride.

Rather than being at home…I could judge that something had gone wrong, and that Woo Ragi and I were alone and separated from the others.

“…Where are we?” I asked.

“Some zone erected by Koo Hui-seo.” [2]

As expected, we seemed to be in some different ‘realm.’

However…Because Woo Ragi replied immediately, as if he were waiting for my question, he must have known exactly when I had come to my senses and opened my eyes. I thought he’d make some abusive remarks, like telling me to get off his back or blaming all his frustrations on me, the ‘homo.’

Though I was on his back for a long while, he had yet to ask me to climb down; the swordsman just continued to silently walk somewhere. I had thought about raising my head to observe my surroundings, but I ended up adjusting my position to rest my cheek on his other shoulder. My heart was uncomfortable, but my body was at ease.

‘He’s got such a pretty face, but his back is…so wide…’

Woo Ragi really had everything except for a decent personality. For a while, I let myself be carried like that, thoughts wandering. However, after a seemingly long time had passed, I cautiously asked, “Do you know…how to get out of here?”

Woo Ragi responded with a shocking answer, “How should I know?”

“Y-You have no idea?”

“You don’t know either.”

“No, that’s not what I meant…! Then, where are we going?”

“…Don’t tell me, you can’t see around you in this level of darkness? You don’t see how those bastards, following your blood scent, keep coming for you?”

“What?”

“That’s why we’re constantly on the move.” With that said, Woo Ragi continued pretty vigorously. Was there really some unseen opponent in the

dark Woo Ragi was fighting against? Goosebumps ran up my spine.

I stared straight ahead, but it was hard to identify anything in the dark and could only see the back of Woo Ragi's head. Eventually, I buried my face into the swordsman's back and tried to stifle the sound of my breaths. After all, there was nothing else I could do.

[Ruff!]

I could very faintly hear the sound of a dog's bark or a wolf's grunt. Simultaneously, Woo Ragi's shoulders stiffened until they became as hard as stone. A sharp wind brushed past my back; as it passed by, something moist sprinkled onto my hands. It was hot…and smelled nauseating.

"Nngh…"

"Just keep your head shoved down. Don't be so…! Cumbersome."

"…Alright." Since Woo Ragi was moving so intensely, I thought it'd be better to flatten and press myself against the swordsman's body.

We stayed in that state for a long time; after a while, Woo Ragi's behavior gradually changed. It seemed that he had dealt with everything that had rushed at us.

"Haah… I'm going crazy." Woo Ragi sighed, frustrated. Even if he killed all the enemies now, who knew how long this situation would continue?

Of course I was anxious. The only person I could rely on in this unexpected situation–where I could see nothing in the pitch-black surroundings–was Woo Ragi, and…

'Seo Dawon…must be worried about me, right?'

We couldn't connect or communicate with the other servants at all. Just then, Woo Ragi suddenly stopped walking. Nervous, I grabbed at his shoulders with tense fingers. "W-What?"

“The sun is rising… Fuck, where is this? Is this Koo Hui-seo’s house?”

“What?”

“Jung Garam’s better at getting a grasp of the field’s underlying structure…” Woo Ragi murmured.

I was shocked and puzzled by his grumbles. The sun rose? Wouldn’t that mean the surroundings should be brighter?

‘Then, why can’t I see anything yet?’

I rubbed at my eyes again. However, I could still only see pitch darkness. Actually, I couldn’t even see the hands rubbing at my eyes. Once again I stretched up my hands and pressed into my eyeballs, but nothing had changed.

By then, I panicked; I recklessly reached out and grabbed whatever was in front–Woo Ragi’s head, of course. I could feel the softness of his hair and the strands in between my fingers, but my eyes couldn’t make out the unique golden color that should be there.

Woo Ragi looked back at me without hiding his displeasure as soon as he felt my touch. Of course, I couldn’t see such actions but I confirmed it through how his hair swept across my hands.

“What?” He asked.

“R-Right now… Is it bright? Is there light?”

“What bullshit…?”

“My…eyes…”

“What?”

“I can’t see…”

“……”

As I spoke, I kept rubbing at my eyes–it felt uncomfortable, like there was something stuck between my eyelid and my eyeballs.

However, because Woo Ragi dropped me to the floor, I could no longer continue rubbing. Bewildered, I was dismayed at the feeling of being pushed away; soon, I felt abandoned in the darkness. “W-Why…?”

“……”

“W-Where did you go? My eyes really are strange! I can’t see anything, okay?!”

“……”

I scrambled to reach out to where I estimated Woo Ragi might be, but I grabbed at nothing. Still, I kept my arms outstretched as I walked around. I couldn’t believe that the Swordsman would just leave me behind and disappear. “Woo Ragi… Ragi-yah! Woo Ragi-ssi… W-Woo Ragi-nim…!”

“……”

“You’re not there? D-Did you really abandon me?”

“……”

“You couldn’t have…right?” After calling out for a long while, I fell into a panic. I sat down and began to helplessly weep.

And, only then did that crazy bastard open his mouth. “…I guess you really can’t see.”

His voice came from behind–not where I had reached out. I stiffened in surprise; Woo Ragi lifted me from the back. I remained rigid in his embrace and stared blankly at the source of his voice.

“Are you a faucet? Stop crying. It’s frustrating.”

“……”

“Would I really abandon you? You’re so dramatic–I just sat you down for 1 minute…”

And I… When I heard those shameless remarks, anger bubbled within me. Eventually, I wiped my tears with my sleeve and cursed at him, “You… You madman! I really thought you went crazy!!”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Poor bb, he’s having such a rough time T_T

Also, Ragi, slapping a guy’s butt is kinda homoerotic.

Footnotes

1. This might require some explaining. Lee-kyung is saying that Woo Ragi slapping him on the butt is like someone spanking a child. He’s upset because they’re the same age, and, therefore, he should be afforded a simulacrum of respect that comes from that.
2. (gyeol-gye). It’s an esoteric word used in Old Buddhist mythos. A is a zone set up by a monk in order to create a realm untouchable by others.

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Chapter 239

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However, the bastard pulled me back into his embrace, disregarding my protests. I struggled wildly about, brandishing my hands violently, but my fingers caught nothing.

Then, in that state, my feet rose into the air. Woo Ragi had lifted me up and leaned me back in his arms. I was relieved by the solid feelings of arms around my waist and the feel of a firm chest against my back; however, I was a bit upset at how relieved I felt.

As he placed a hand on my wheezing back, he asked, “Why are you suddenly blind?”

“…….” If I knew, I wouldn’t be sitting around like this.

Instead of answering, I grabbed the Swordsman’s shoulders; Woo Ragi had nothing more to say about that.

But soon, his twisted voice flowed into my ear. “You must be uncomfortable.”

His voice was laden with irritation–as if intimidating me to stop squirming around.

I nodded without hesitation, “Yeah.”

“Who do you think is more uncomfortable now?”

“…Me, the blind person who fell into this strange place with the most crass servant.”

“I haven’t even started with my complaints with you.”

“……” I shut my mouth, exhausted from his shady remarks.

Perhaps he was also tired of this line of conversation, as he asked about my body’s condition. “Is everything alright other than your eyes?”

“I don’t know…”

My whole body throbbed, but I didn’t know where the pain originated. Being blind was such a big shock that I paid little attention to the relatively trivial aches wracking my body.

‘No way, if my eyesight never returns…’

As I thought of this pessimistic, worst-case scenario, my soul exited my body.

However, as soon as I finished speaking, Woo Ragi scarily groped my body as he pleased; my chaotic mind returned to reality in an instant, as if someone had poured cold water on me. I screamed, “W-What are you doing?!”

“I’m checking for injuries on your body. Or, you could just answer my question properly.” Then, using his robust grip strength, he twisted my arm.

I screamed, “Aagh! It hurts! What are you doing!”

“So dramatic…”

“Don’t touch it! I said, don’t touch!”

“Do you really think I’d want to molest a perverted homo like you?” He simultaneously pressed hard on the nape of my neck and bent my arm back.

The painful impact stung–the ache ran up my spine like a lightning strike. Woo Ragi must have been surprised at my scream and the way my face burrowed into his shoulder; he asked, “What? What did I do for you to scream like that?”

“Ngh…Hngh…”

“No way–are you keeled over like that just because I pressed at your pressure points a little?” As he said that, he grabbed my roughly breathing head and jerked it backwards, perhaps to check my expression. After he finished his observation, he flung it back down again.

I hit my forehead hard on his shoulder because of the rebound; I inadvertently inwardly cursed. Woo Ragi also placed his hands on my back and patted me, as if he were trying to soothe me. I think that touch irritated me more than when I hit my head.

“You shouldn’t have surprised me with your drool.” He made excuses for himself.

That was not an apology at all; I punched him in the chest instead of answering. Woo Ragi dithered for a bit before staying still letting me hit him three more times. The fourth time, he caught my fist and didn’t let go.

It seems like his minuscule conscience couldn’t endure being hit four times in a row. In the end, I gave up on beating him and took a few labored breaths. The swordsman finally let my hand go and began walking somewhere.

“Where are you going?” I asked anxiously, wondering if he’d abandon me again.

He replied docilely, “There’s a building ahead that looks like a mansion. I’ll go there first.”

“Is there a way to escape if you go there?”

“….Haah, who knows. I’ve already said this isn’t my specialty, alright?” He snapped back. Still, it seems like he had a hunch. The Swordsman continued to inform me of his plans. “Normally, in dungeons, the environment changes when you move onto the next room or field…”

“…….”

“Besides, that mansion wouldn’t just appear for no reason.”

“……”

“Or, do you have any other ideas?”

I also understood that there were no other apparent ways forward except for his proposed plan. At my slight nod, the swordsman, while carrying me, sprinted even faster. His body hardly even shook despite the speed; I could barely tell he was running as he didn’t breathe heavily either.

* * *

After running like that for about 10 more minutes, Woo Ragi slowed down. And then I heard a hitherto unheard sound–like branches shaking in the wind. I asked the swordsman, “Is this perhaps…the garden?”

“I’m going in.” Woo Ragi–was he being indifferent?–ignored my question and held me tighter.

The scent of grass and something fishy wafted across my nose and thickened until the area was full of that scent; it really felt like we had crossed into the garden. I wanted to push at Woo Ragi and ask why he didn’t answer me, but I felt a murky, dreary vibe. So, I eventually closed my mouth.

Creak–!

Woo Ragi's arm moved. It sounded as if he pushed through a rusty gate and, immediately after, I heard footsteps on a stone floor.

Judging from the trudging sounds of his footsteps echoing around, it sounded like we had just entered the large, empty entrance hall of a mansion.

I moved my head closer to the echoes and only stopped moving when Woo Ragi placed his hand on top of my head, as if he were telling me to stay still.

"Haah… How am I supposed to get over there while carrying this luggage?" he muttered, shamelessly poking my head with a finger. Enraged, I glared at him, but he placidly ignored that gaze.

"Why are you staring like that? All you have to do is cling onto me," he said.

"What's there?"

"There are these two stone statues over there–it feels like something bad will happen if we touch them. Between them, there's an unbroken slab; I think we have to pass through there."

"What?"

"I said, there are stone statues over there holding a mace. Didn't you see the gargoyle statues at the [Tower of Command] as well?"

Gargoyle… They still often featured in my nightmares. The statues, with closed eyes, woke up one by one and flew towards me; I really thought my life flashed before my eyes. To hear that there's more of those things in front of us…

Furthermore, if even Woo Ragi said that he probably should avoid touching them, that said a lot about the monster's level. Riddled with anxiety, I suddenly thought of something, "But, if Koo Hui-seo really made

this place… Can he really summon those monsters? Isn't this essentially a dungeon?"

"Isn't it futile to call Koo Hui-seo a human being now?"

I really couldn't really understand why Woo Ragi said that, so I simply stared at him. At my silence, I believe he stared back; however, he was silent for a long time. It was as if he wondered if he could inform me on this matter. After a long while, he opened his mouth, "According to Seo Dawon… Koo Hui-seo is a sacrifice meant for the devil."

"The devil?"

"He didn't tell you anything?"

"……"

I was always greatly concerned by the Mage's silence, but I was even more resentful today.

Woo Ragi clicked his tongue curtly–he took his own conclusions from my silence. "If he didn't tell you, don't worry about it. It's not just you–he rarely tells anyone else what he thinks."

I couldn't tell if he was covering for Seo Dawon or comforting me, but a part of me accepted that explanation. Why doesn't Seo Dawon tell anyone what's on his mind? "…Why won't he talk about those things? Weren't you ever frustrated by that?"

"Never."

"So then, you just…do as he orders? Blindly?"

"Yeah." His one-word answers weren't trying to be haphazard nor was he mocking me; his tone really seemed to convey that's how he truly behaved.

I couldn't understand, so I stared where I thought his face may be.

Woo Ragi must have read my something in my expression; he shrugged his shoulders. “We all have our roles.”

“You’ve really never doubted Seo Dawon’s words?”

“Why do you doubt them?”

“That’s…just something you might wonder. Why does he act like that? Stuff like that…”

“Don’t you know that I’ve been friends with Seo Dawon ever since we were young?”

“That’s…”

“We’ve been together for about 10 years. You think I’d wonder about something like that? He’s always been that way.” With that said, Woo Ragi said something pretty shocking, “Kim Olim, Seo Dawon, and I… When the three of us became Users, we went into the dungeon together for the first time and almost died.”

“What?”

“Seo Dawon saved me and Kim Olim.”

“……”

“We were the only ones who followed his orders, and we lived. The rest died.” His voice was tranquil and didn’t tremble.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung and Ragi’s dynamic is always interesting. Hamster is sassy with the swordsman, and I appreciate that.

Also, more on the Red lotus dynamic! It seems like Dawon’s had trust issues since, like, forever! I’ll comment more on Woo Ragi’s role and mentality in a later chapter.

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Chapter 240

Chapter 240

“Since back then and until now, Seo Dawon has been a leader who, if nothing else, has never spouted bullshit nor led me wrong…”

“……”

“Therefore, I can respect that he’ll deal with his personal life on his own. I’m not bothered by that.”

I couldn’t see Woo Ragi’s expression, but I could hear the swordsman’s trust through his voice. He didn’t even ask me for my opinion as he confessed all this to me. Woo Ragi probably had little interest in whether I’d praise or curse the Mage.

I was surprised by his attitude. After all, I had always thought that Woo Ragi was someone who’d sneer at blind loyalty.

After being speechless for a brief moment, I said, in a subdued tone, “How…unexpected. I just thought you and Seo Dawon… I don’t know if these are the right words, but…”

“……”

“I thought you guys were equals in your friendship. That isn’t to say that you’re Seo Dawon’s subordinate or anything…”

“Ah.” Woo Ragi seemed to hem and haw over his words before fixing his grip on me and continuing to walk. Contrary to my expectations, he

didn’t seem too upset with my comments. Soon, he answered without much malice, “I think I’ve heard that before…”

“……”

“Ryu Hyerin said the same thing.”

“What?” It felt like I was hit in the back of the head by something blunt.

However, Woo Ragi didn’t stop there and continued to be harsh, “She didn’t have any friends either… I guess your loneliness was similar to hers?’

“W-What are you saying…!”

“One thing is different though–she tried to test people.” He sounded deeply disillusioned then. While I blinked, Woo Ragi continued to drop one bombshell after the other, “Did you know?”

“What…?”

“Bae Jaemin and Ryu Hyerin had been seeing each other since before the [Tower of Command].”

“W…What?! No way… Ryu Hyerin was two-timing them?!” [1]

“And, Seo Dawon probably knew about it? He’s more perceptive than me.”

“……”

My head was spinning–it felt like it was set ablaze. Woo Ragi, seeing my dumbfounded expression, unsuccessfully tried to hold back his snickers.

Honestly, how could he laugh in this situation? Because of his reaction, I wondered if Woo Ragi was simply lying just to make fun of me. However, when I opened my mouth to argue, he blocked my mouth with one hand and shushed me. Then, he whispered softly, “Be quiet… you’re too noisy.”

“Mmmph…!”

“You’re not forgetting that we’re passing by monsters right now, right?”

“……”

It felt frustrating to be suffocated and treated as a loud individual, but the thought of the gargoyle statues froze my lips. I was definitely curious to learn more, but I didn’t want to be chased by monsters because I had asked a question.

I bit my lip and nodded softly to show I understood. Woo Ragi noticed my cooperative attitude and quickly took his hands off my mouth. He then lowered his voice to a whisper and continued, “I never liked whoever Seo Dawon dated. They kept pestering me as well…”

I stared at the origin of voice with an expression laden with deep disbelief. It was unlikely that Woo Ragi would have been kind to any of the Mage’s past girlfriends. Even subtle, appreciative glances would need some sort of encouragement…who would flirt with a rude person like him?

However, Woo Ragi pressed his finger into my forehead when he saw my distrust. My teeth clenched, and I shook my head at his immediate chastise.

In a derisive tone, he answered, “I’m telling the truth, alright? Besides, it wasn’t just me. They were good at making messes and being *_indiscreet_* with others around me.”

“…….”

“Kim Olim suffered a lot too. Honestly, I thought that all of Seo Dawon’s lovers were talented novelists.” [2]

“……”

“Isn’t it strange?”

From Woo Ragi's tone, I could feel that he had genuinely suffered due to Seo Dawon's past lovers.

As I listened to him blankly, my mind began to draw imaginary scenes. I could imagine how the servants struggled as these ex-lovers did unnecessary things to attract the Mage's attention.

I also didn't like that those women had said things to Kim Olim… However, though I hated to admit it, I could sympathize with their feelings. My lips instinctively twitched.

Woo Ragi read into my minute body movements, "Seo Dawon? You want to know what Seo Dawon was like?"

"……"

"He was a little different from what you'd expect, probably." And, with such a meaningful remark, Woo Ragi ignored me and just continued walking.

I thought Woo Ragi was trying to ridicule me, so I tried to say something. But, as soon as I moved, I felt his fingers press down on my lips. I realized that we might be walking through a dangerous section and had no choice but to wait quietly.

However, while I waited, complicated thoughts burrowed into my brain. What on earth did Woo Ragi think I assumed? I…

[Grrrrrrrrngh…..]

However, before I could fall deeper into my thoughts, an ominous sound came from above our heads. That sound was accompanied by the sound of pebbles rolling and clattering. I instinctively grabbed the swordsman's arms.

"Honestly…" Woo Ragi cursed and gripped my hands tightly. At the same time, I heard something heavy hitting the ground beside us.

Crash–!

“Argh!” Though I shouted in fear and astonishment, Woo Ragi was unfazed.

However, he mumbled to himself in a frustrated tone, “Why’d they wake up? Was there some kind of condition?”

“W-What happened?”

“Do you think I would know? Isn’t it your fault?”

“What? What did I do….?!”

“Because, I perfectly stealthed myself.”

“Even so, what does that have to do with me…Don’t Laugh! You were the only one chatting away up until a moment ago.”

“Shut up.” Woo Ragi grumbled and hugged me tight enough to steal my breath; he quickly dodged to the left. He moved so fast that a whirling wind swept past my ears.

However, perhaps the monster following us was larger than I imagined. The swordsman quickly changed direction and ran at a tremendous speed; he couldn’t easily shake the monster off his trail, though. He released his frustrations on me, “Haah. I can’t even set this thing down somewhere…”

”D-Don’t put me down!”

“You’re fucking heavy.”

“……” I wanted to refute those last words, but I reigned in my retort. After all, it couldn’t be easy to run around with an adult man on his back.

Instead, I clung close to the swordsman’s body because I was worried he’d throw me onto the ground. I didn’t forget to grab Woo Ragi’s collar as hard as I could. As soon as I did so, he snorted as if he couldn’t believe me, but, fortunately, he didn’t shake my hand away.

“[Unsheathe].” And, like that, he called out a skill. Of course, I had no idea how that skill manifested. I was still bathed in darkness; I couldn’t even distinguish a single ray of light.

However, as soon as he activated his skill, I felt an ice-cold energy, amorphous energy above our heads. It felt like we were hiding behind a pillar of ice?

In addition, it felt like Woo Ragi’s upper body became rigid. His arm–the one that wasn’t holding me–reached back.

Soon, I could hear loud noises in the distance–like fireworks going off. The swordsman sighed in irritation, as if he couldn’t hit his targets.

Well, I didn’t think much more about that…My thoughts were interrupted by what the swordsman said afterwards, “Hey, wrap your legs around my waist.”

“What?”

“It’s cumbersome to have you dangling. I need to run fast.”

I looked at Woo Ragi’s face–or where I assumed his face was–with a blood-drained complexion, but he was already tapping my legs with his knee. It was as if he was telling me to hang onto him with my own strength.

I loathed doing so, but I had no choice and inevitably squeezed my thighs around the swordsman as hard as I could. Though, I tried not to think about anything else…

However, Woo Ragi’s clothes proved to be a problem. What were they made out of? They were so slippery that I had to fix my position several times when I slipped down to the swordsman’s waist. I felt strangely embarrassed, and my mouth felt dry.

However, Woo Ragi, this psycho, didn’t lend a hand and instead began to make sarcastic remarks. “I told you to wrap your legs around me, not rub them all over my body…”

I couldn’t endure anymore, so I shot back, “Then why don’t you cooperate and lend a hand…”

“Are you happy molesting me with that kind of excuse?”

“I’m not molesting you…! I also hate this! I don’t like you either! Your clothes are slippery–what am I supposed to do?!”

However, my protests were futile in the face of his homophobia, “Homos like to rub against guys like this, don’t they?”

“I have eyes too, you know.”

“You’re blind right now.”

“Argh, honestly!”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: It’s interesting to see the underlying mechanics of Woo Ragi and Dawon’s professional dynamic. I was honestly just as surprised as Lee-kyung to see that Dawon and Ragi weren’t equals. In a sense, I can see why Woo Ragi comments that he’s not used to leading or figuring out scenarios…and can’t find out what triggered the monster’s awakening. (Lmao Lee-kyung, you’re not alone? Or Maybe, considering the swordsman’s advantages, you’re not so bad after all?). That seems to have been Dawon’s job. This reminds me of how Dawon called Garam a genius; Garam leveled incredibly fast–all on his own. Similarly, Dawon trusted

Garam to go off, during the Tower of Command scenario, to try and find hints. Perhaps the ability to see through dungeons is what separates the normal Users from the extraordinary.

Also… Why are Ragi and Lee-kyung's interactions like a sitcom lmao. Like, I want to duct-tape the homophobia out of his mouth, but… The way they interact is somewhat funny.

Footnotes

1. = two legs/both legs. This is slang for two-timing someone.
2. Basically Woo Ragi is alluding to the fact that the Mage's lovers made dramas, like a writer for a K-drama.

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Chapter 241

Chapter 241

Bang-bang!

However, our witty stand-up comedy routine ended there. [1] A heavy sound echoed from afar; it felt like a huge stone statue was rushing towards us.

My assumption must have been correct–Woo Ragi held me, like I was some luggage, and ran wordlessly at a tremendous speed. I had no idea where on earth our destination was, but, at our speed, it almost felt like we were driving in a car.

I buried my face into the swordsman's back and hugged him tightly around the shoulder. While running, he flinched, as if he found me annoying, but he seemed to let my actions slide.

Spring–!

Then, he jumped so high–I had no idea how many meters above ground we were. Whenever Woo Ragi stepped (on the ground?), he made a creaking sound as if he were running across a shabby wooden floor. The planks could barely supporting the weight of two people.

After leaping a few times like that, the swordsman leaned over, as if he grabbed onto some handhold and were peering off a ledge. His body was completely tilted, and I was worried he'd fall. I hurried to cling to his body again; instead of making more abusive remarks, Woo Ragi quietly observed something below.

He waited for a long while, jumped, and escaped from the monster through this vertical route. Afterwards, the swordsman took me inside one of the rooms within this mansion–I could only assume this was a room thanks to the barely noticeable sound of a door closing, his soft footsteps on the carpet, and the touch of the soft bed on which Woo Ragi set me down.

I hesitated before placing my legs completely atop the bed; he sat down next to me and created a depression in the mattress. “I saw it while jumping around.”

“Huh? Yeah…”

“The monster had a key in its mouth.”

“What?” I blinked meaninglessly at his words and then stared at–around–the swordsman with a questioning look. “Then…”

“It’s probably an escape hint.”

After contemplating, I asked, “It’s probably… impossible to carry me and fight that monster, right?”

“Yeah,” Woo Ragi replied succinctly. I also had no desire to latch onto him like some bulletproof vest while he fought.

However, if I separated from Woo Ragi’s side, I wouldn’t be able to defend myself at all. Woo Ragi also seemed to be concerned about my eyes’ condition as well. In this brief, quiet lull, the swordsman tried to tinker with something around my eyes; judging from the sweeping wind across my eyes, he must be fanning with his hands.

“[Light].” Still tranquil, Woo Ragi took out an illuminating item from his inventory. He seemed to check something several times before quietly saying, “It’s like your nerves are completely blocked. Your pupils aren’t reacting to light at all.”

Just as he said, my vision was completely dark though the [Light] skill was used. I nodded meekly, “…Yeah…”

“I don’t see any external trauma.”

“Really?”

That was fortunate–I was worried about what kind of injury my eyes had suffered.

“Wait,” he said.

“Huh? Hmmm…”

Woo Ragi slowly groped the region around my eye sockets. He was probably looking for fracture lines or other seemingly invisible injuries.

With an anxious heart, I waited until the swordsman pulled his hands away.

Soon afterwards, he quickly took his hands back. “As I thought, you’re probably under a curse?”

“What?”

“There’s no signs of trauma or other external factors, and yet you’ve suddenly become blind. This can’t be caused by anything else but a curse.” The way he apathetically commented as if he were passively observing someone else’s dilemma made his tone sound so mean.

As I thought over his words, I suddenly asked, “Don’t you usually get cursed…when you touch something weird? I haven’t done anything, though…”

“You’ll get cursed if you foolishly crawl around in a strange house.” Though I asked quite sincerely, his reply was dry and absentminded.

“That’s…! Then why didn’t you get cursed!? We got sucked here together…”

“Your curse is clearly disadvantaging me as well?”

“That’s not what I mean! I’m just saying it’s weird… Why am I the only one affected?… You seem perfectly fine.”

“If we’re really dividing us into different categories… Haven’t you cursed me in some sense?”

I had briefly forgotten that Woo Ragi was dead, so my shoulders inadvertently trembled. I made an unintentional gaffe.

However, Woo Ragi didn’t seem to care much about that and didn’t say anything in particular. Then, all of a sudden, the mattress rocked once more; I realized the swordsman had laid down on the bed.

“Are you perhaps…going to fall asleep?” I asked.

“No? This pig was hanging on my neck all day–I’m stretching.”

“……”

Did he really have to show off his ability to anger others every single time he opened his mouth?

I glared towards the origin of his voice, but the thought of staring blindly wasn’t exactly desirable. So, I simply closed my eyes and laid on the bed as well. To be honest, it was exhausting to cling to Woo Ragi. I thought about lying down and organizing my thoughts rather than awkwardly half-sitting, half-squatting…

Of course, I expected Woo Ragi to throw another tantrum if I were to follow his actions and lie down… But, my stamina was at its limits now. Still, I placed my head at the edge of the mattress, careful not to brush against the swordsman as much as possible. As soon as I changed my posture, sure enough, I heard a sarcastic voice.

“Haah, he’s following me and laying down now.” As expected, Woo Ragi bullied me.

I ignored his comments and fumbled with my hands to find a dusty pillow. Then, laying my head down, I shot back, “If you don’t shut up, I’m

going to cling to you.”

“……” Perhaps he really loathed that consequence, Woo Ragi went silent afterwards.

While a quiet, forlorn atmosphere settled around us, I pondered how we’d escape from this place. The swordsman told me a giant statue monster held a key in his mouth…

‘And, considering how Woo Ragi ran away from it by continuously jumping up… I guess that statue isn’t a flying monster–unlike the gargoyles…’

Then, was it just extraordinarily big? After contemplating about this and that, I called out to the swordsman, asking for his input, “Hey…”

“……”

“You’re listening, right?”

In lieu of answering, Woo Ragi shifted on the mattress. For some reason, it sounded like he turned his back towards me. However, his ears should still work fine, so I continued to talk to myself. “That monster can’t fly, right? It’s just huge, right?”

“That’s right.” The swordsman’s voice echoed, as if he were talking to the wall.

I continued, “Just how large is it?”

“It’s about 10 meters tall and has a key gripped in its mouth. It looks a little like a twin-headed Ogre… well, rather than two-headed, it looks like it has two faces.”

“What?”

“One face is weeping; the other face, on the back of its head, has a gigantic grin. The smiling mouth is the one holding the key… Because of that, this monster doesn’t have a blind spot.”

I got goosebumps when I imagined the monster from Woo Ragi's descriptions. Just what kind of monster would look like that?

Appalled, I said, "It has only one body?"

"It looks like two chests were plastered onto its torso–four arms and two legs. But, that's what the one who has the key looks like… The statue across the room has the head of a cat."

"There's two stone statues?"

"Didn't I say that from the beginning?" The swordsman's voice was laden with contempt.

I did remember him saying that there was a stone statue holding an iron mace. "Ah, then the one holding the mace…"

"Yeah, the cat."

"Then…the statue with the four arms and the key in its mouth…"

"It did have a sheathed sword around its waist; it didn't unsheathe it when I took you and jumped away. But, I can't say that it'll react the same when we go after the key…"

"……."

"Normally, monsters with weapons will use them."

I sighed gloomily. Even if I were fine and capable, I wondered if Woo Ragi could deal with those two monsters after leaving me somewhere. First, his opponents were just too large–10 meters tall…

"Then, did you see any monsters besides those two?" I asked.

"None for now at least." With that said, Woo Ragi added, "There were a few broken stone fragments around those two."

"……"

“It’s like a fiery tournament had broken out.”

Of course, his remarks weren’t helpful for my state of mind.

Become a Patron!

TL: It’s too hot in my house >.< Think I skimped a bit on the after-PR editing, so tell me if there are any mistakes.

Also, RIP Lee-kyung. It must suck to be blinded in a dungeon. It’s also somewhat refreshing to see that Woo Ragi doesn’t have all the answers and isn’t afraid to state it. We know from Seo Dawon’s POV that he’s not omniscient either, but the Mage really does try to cultivate that image.

Footnotes

1. (mandam) is actually more akin to Rakugo–a comedic storytelling medium that often involves telling a long, complicated story in a comedic way. Stand-up comedy routine is probably more familiar to english audiences; both share parodying political or social commentary.

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Chapter 242

Chapter 242

“Haah…” As soon as I hopelessly sighed, the mattress creaked–Woo Ragi probably shifted.

And his voice, which I had heard from next to me, had begun to originate from above my head. He must has shifted to look at me. “What’s with the sigh?”

“I’m at a loss…”

“You don’t do anything, anyway.”

“…….”

Woo Ragi truly had a talent to shut others up by annoying them; however, he wasn’t trying to scold me at that moment. He stared at me silently before saying, “Even if your eyes were healthy…you still probably wouldn’t have been very helpful?”

It sounded like he was only stating the truth, so I couldn’t even be angry anymore. Besides, I also got used to Woo Ragi’s speech patterns, so I knew this was simply a remark without any particular emotion behind it. When he wanted to be malicious, he’d call me a homo.

So, I could answer without my ego rearing its head. “That’s true, but… I’m seriously just luggage right now.”

“It’s probably better for you to be blind.”

“What?”

“I feel like you’d throw a fit if you saw this place.”

Uneasy, I grabbed the pillow that I had buried my face into tightly. Ever since I felt the dust blowing around in the wind, I actually thought the rooms wouldn’t appear normal, but… Perhaps the surroundings are absolutely filthy–or there might be bugs scurrying about.

I had no way of knowing because I was blind; even if I were to ask clarifying questions, no one would answer. A renewed uncomfortable feeling surged forth; I felt itchy all of a sudden…

“The pillow I’m laying on…is it super dirty?” I asked.

“Hmmm. If it were me, I’d never let it touch my face?”

“Why didn’t you say anything–Haah… Whatever.” I grumbled, placed the pillow back in its original spot, and laid down. The swordsman giggled in glee.

After a short silence, Woo Ragi said, “You never know when our environment will change, so you might as well get some sleep.”

He recommended that I recover my stamina; I closed my unseeing eyes, but sleep felt so far in this unfamiliar place.

I fixed my posture several times; each time, the mattress creaked. Though the swordsman didn’t say anything, the vibe gradually became murkier and murkier. I breathed deeply and then muttered, “I don’t think I’ll be able to fall asleep…”

“You want me to hit you on the back of the head and knock you out?”

“…….”

Woo Ragi answered immediately as if he had prepared that response. I mouthed, “fuck off,” but I had no idea if the swordsman saw that or not. He didn’t say anything, so I simply laid by his side, wide awake and sober.

An hour passed like that.

Bang–

I could hear something echoing, as if something had slammed against a distant hallway. Before I could do anything, Woo Ragi quickly dragged me off the bed. “[Unsheathe.]”

His reaction rate was unprecedented; the speed at which he activated his skills was extraordinary as well. The relaxed mood he had while leisurely grumbling with me had disappeared in an instant. I had become tense through osmosis.

‘No way, did the monster downstairs climb up?’

That was entirely too plausible, but I didn’t bother to confirm the situation and ask. The swordsman had silenced his breathing, and he, someone who hated touching me, had pressed me against his chest, as if urging me to stay silent.

Rather than feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable, anxiety began to dominate my emotions, filling the entire room. I kept an ear out as I clung to the swordsman, hoping Woo Ragi would say something.

[Haaaaaa…. Arghhhhh…. Hagghhhhh…]

However, my sensitive ears didn’t pick up the swordsman’s voice and instead picked up a groan that travelled through the air close to our room. It sounded like a ghost in a graveyard was singing; as soon as I heard that, goosebumps raised all over my body.

Woo Ragi moved swiftly but cautiously as soon as he heard the noise. Without taking any extraneous movement, he had brought my body close to his and quietly exited the room. I sensed that he was moving quietly by hugging the wall.

“That’s not broken…” Woo Ragi murmured.

I could feel him look down at me as he spoke. His center of gravity shifted forward, and he grabbed my hand subtly tighter.

I wanted him to continue speaking, but he remained silent and began to run somewhere. Then, after running for some time, he said something strange. “Hey, you really can’t see anything right?”

“Huh? Y-Yeah…”

It felt like he was double-checking my condition. I nodded absentmindedly and vaguely looked towards the direction of his voice. I wondered why he bothered asking me that question.

“Then…” Woo Ragi said.

“Hm?”

“From now on, no matter what you hear, stay still. Got it? Never open your mouth.”

“What? What will I hear?”

“It doesn’t matter what noise you’ll hear. Just try not to listen to it if it’s not my voice.”

“A-Alright…”

Even though Woo Ragi knew I was incredibly curious, he didn’t elaborate. It wasn’t on purpose–it felt like he was bewildered and had little idea how to craft a proper explanation.

However, this confusing silence didn’t last long. The thumping sound that had been in the background was clearly closer. As soon as he heard that sound, Woo Ragi jumped up, dangled from somewhere, and clambered up. As soon as he regained foothold, he whispered, “I’m jumping down.”

“What? Arghh!”

After giving me that meaningless advance notice, the swordsman dove down. The sensation of air brushing past my feet made me terribly stressed–being blind made my discomfort worse. However, I had no time to complain.

As Woo Ragi fell, he activated one of his skills. “[Curtain Call].”

I could feel a chill on my back; the sound of something loudly crashing and crumbling echoed out.

At that moment, I heard ‘that sound’ Woo Ragi had warned me about.

[Lee-kyung ah.]

I looked back reflexively. I was sure I heard Seo Dawon’s voice. Before I could open my mouth and say something, Woo Ragi’s hand covered my mouth. “Don’t respond! Are you an idiot? Seo Dawon isn’t here.”

“Mmmph…!”

“That kind of monster imitates others. If you answer, you’re fucked. So, stay still.”

“……”

It was hard to understand what was happening, but the swordsman’s voice sounded exceptionally desperate.

I nodded slightly; the swordsman loosened his grip. However, from then on, the monster’s voice, imitating Seo Dawon, became increasingly intelligible.

[Lee-kyung-ah, can’t you see me?]

“……” If I had been slightly doubtful before, the more it spoke the more its voice creepily resembled the Mage’s.

In addition, its voice grew louder and louder. I felt vaguely horrified at its increasingly accurate mimicry. That ‘thing’ sounded like it was gradually adopting Seo Dawon’s shape.

“Perhaps this mansion was a trap.”

“……”

Woo Ragi muttered something that sapped my hope.

‘What does he mean by trap? Why now?’

However, the swordsman did not seem discouraged; instead, he faced the unidentified voice head on. I could feel his summoned echo blades rushing past the back of my head. He spread his blades fully out, adopting an all-out attack stance.

I couldn’t tell if he was making the deliberate decision to face the monster head-on or if this course of action was the inevitable second best option because we had no escape route. The depressing reality of this situation, though, was that Woo Ragi would be fighting with a fatal weakness–he was still carrying me after all. He was probably unlikely to flee…

“…W-What should I do,” I asked, unable to bear the anxiety and suspense.

“Just stick close to me.” Woo Ragi spoke bluntly before brandishing his arms wildly. “[Masquerade].”

As soon as he invoked his skill, a great gale poured forth. I wondered if this was what it felt like to be at the center of a tornado; it took all my strength to barely cling onto his body.

However…

[Gravity.]

I heard a subdued, soft voice; simultaneously, Woo Ragi’s knees instantly bent and bowed.

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TL: I’ve already said this in the discord, but, FYI, I might slow down next week! I have died a little from my AC dying.

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Chapter 243

Chapter 243

“Ahhh…!” I grabbed at the swordsman’s hem, worried that Woo Ragi would collapse.

The swordsman was shaky, but he seemed to endure the weight. His knee was barely off the ground. However, unlike when he had easily leapt up with me in his arms, I could feel his arm muscles spasming.

“A-Are you okay…?”

“What about you?” Woo Ragi asked, voice filtering through clenched teeth.

“Me? I’m fine…”

“Then, get off for a moment.” As Woo Ragi said that, he flung me onto the floor. I was startled, but I felt he wasn’t intentionally being malicious and, rather, the situation had gotten too difficult for him. So, I awkwardly plopped down on the cold floor, and chased the sounds of Woo Ragi’s movements with my unseeing gaze.

Crash–!

Soon afterwards, it sounded like something shattered across the floor. A few pieces of stone that bounced off the fractured floor grazed across my cheek. I flinched, and my shoulders trembled. As soon as I leaned back, something that seemed like a cold stick touched my back.

“Heeee!” Startled, I turned around. I heard the echoing thrum of a metal plate. I couldn’t be sure because of my blindness, but it felt like Woo Ragi

had left one of his echo blades behind me.

When I reached out my hand and brushed it with my fingertips, the echo blade retreated slightly. The way it kept away reminded me of a magnet.

So, I stopped thinking about trying to touch it and looked straight forward again. I couldn't even see my surroundings anyway–I might as well focus on the swordsman.

I held my breath and concentrated; the clear sounds penetrated my ears. The sound of something tapping and stomping hard on the floor; the lingering sounds of the sword digging deep into the floor. I heard these noises around me, both left and right.

Woo Ragi probably, while running in one direction, kept directing his attacks toward the center. Everytime the swordsman attacked, it sounded like glass scraping against glass. However, I'd heard this sound once before, so I could immediately imagine the scene.

'The sword struck a shield…'

The tension continued to build.

Clank–!

As time passed, I became anxious. It didn't sound like things were bumping against the walls–it sounded like things were crashing into and breaking the walls.

In particular, whenever that monster used a skill, the sound of glass shattering or metal meeting metal erupted. For some reason, it sounded like the swordsman was getting pushed back and pummeled into the ground or walls.

Of course, I couldn't hear any groans from Woo Ragi or anything…But, ominously, his attack rate seemed to come slower and slower.

[Mana Drain.]

“Haah…” At that moment, it sounded like Woo Ragi took a deep breath; the echo blade behind me suddenly flew away. A long silence followed.

“A-Are you alright?” I asked.

“……”

“Woo Ragi, are you okay?!” I couldn’t resist and yelled towards the last place I could hear any sort of movement. However, no one answered me. I couldn’t even hear anything else. I groped and crawled around in that eerie silence.

“W-What is this… Is there no one there?”

At first, I crawled falteringly, but now I began to move with gusto. While it felt like I had moved a fair distance, I ran into nothing. It felt like Woo Ragi and the Monster had disappeared into thin air.

‘Where did the two of them go…? Did I fall into some strange place?’

Even so, I couldn’t possibly just sit in one place. Also, I believed that Woo Ragi, no matter where he disappeared, would come to find me. I crawled around a little more…

Something round suddenly rolled up to my fingertips and touched it. Because I was blind, I couldn’t see what it exactly was, but I quickly removed my hand reflexively.

I didn’t want to imagine something unpleasant, but whatever that thing was…it was so cold. Plus, it felt like there was something stringy, and fur-like on the surface… It felt exactly like hair.

“I-It can’t be…” I shook my head and tried to observe it again.

Before I could reach out again, someone’s footsteps approached. That sound–those footsteps–stopped directly in front of me. Pierced with fear, I raised my head.

[Were you searching for this?]

The voice’s owner kicked the ’round thing’ towards me. As soon as it touched my hand, I clenched my fists and curled my fingers; my body began trembling against my will. “……”

As soon as I was about to say something, I remembered Woo Ragi’s reminder to not respond. My breaths came heavier and heavier as I continued to retreat. However, I soon hit a firm wall.

[Did Ragi tell you not to answer me?]

“……”

That thing, imitating ‘Seo Dawon’s’ voice, asked in an amused tone. I didn’t respond. However, soon, soft fingers touched my cheek. Without hesitation, that ‘thing’ began stroking my face. When I could feel the ring on ‘its’ hand, I firmly shut my eyes.

‘It really feels like Seo Dawon… No, it can’t be….’

[Open your eyes.]

“……”

I clenched my teeth and lowered my head; that ‘thing’ touched my lips as if to make a mockery of me. Then, something damp touched my lips. I could smell a faint scent of blood–a kiss?

“……”

[I’m not a fake, Lee-kyung-ah.]

That ‘thing’ whispered reproachfully at me for not responding. I pushed at him strongly at that moment, but its solid body did not budge one inch. ‘Seo Dawon’ lightly embraced me and buried its face into the nape of my neck. It murmured, lips moving against my skin–

[Don’t you find his words suspicious?]

With that said, ‘Seo Dawon’ stroked my lower back. I clenched my teeth and tried to escape his hands, but the more I struggled the more his arms felt like shackles.

Eventually, in my efforts to slip out from its arms, I finally opened my eyes. And, as soon as I opened my eyes, the swarm of black tentacles holding me and my body collapsed, as if they were sinking to the bottom of a swamp. Simultaneously, I made eye contact with ‘Seo Dawon’ who only had his head and neck left.

“……!”

I couldn’t even scream and opened my eyes wide with shock as I saw ‘Seo Dawon’ in its current state. ‘Seo Dawon’ smiled insidiously and extended black tentacles towards me. Then, those black tentacles slowly began to take on a human form.

Starting from hands and chest–all the way to feet–the tentacles took shape and changed color. Now, it had completely changed into a perfect replica of the Mage I so intimately knew. It then stretched out its newly formed hand towards me.

At that moment.

“I told you not to answer it, you idiot.”

Suddenly, I could hear Woo Ragi’s temperamental voice from below; A diagonal line suddenly appeared in ‘Seo Dawon’s’ chest. Still smiling, ‘Seo Dawon’s’ chest was separated from its head.

I was too weary to even scream; I simply looked on with my stiff mouth open, dazed. ‘Seo Dawon’ became even more gruesome after it was cut open.

Startlingly, Woo Ragi, the one who had cut ‘Seo Dawon’ from behind… had nothing above his neck. He still had the stance of an incredibly disciplined swordsman, but, instead of a head, I could see the cross-section of his neck.

Of course, the anatomical details weren't clearly visible; the edges of his neck were shadowed. Anyway, I couldn't bear to see such a gory scene.

However, I had no time to fall into a panic. "What the… Wh… What the hell…."

"Hey, pick me up by my throat."

"What?" I looked towards the direction of his voice. Woo Ragi's head was near my foot. I stared blankly at his golden hair before, falteringly, lifting his head with both hands. I wasn't confident enough to look into the swordsman's face, so I continued to hold it in its backwards state.

Fortunately (?), Woo Ragi's body, which had finished cutting up 'Seo Dawon,' walked over to me and picked up his head from my hand. Then, as if he were adorning a crown, he fitted his head onto his neck. I couldn't bear to look anymore and lowered my eyes.

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TL: D:
The horror is real ya'll.

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Chapter 244

Chapter 244

“What are you doing?” Woo Ragi immediately grabbed my hand. As a result, I clearly saw the line between his neck and head heal until only unblemished skin was left; the swordman’s head returned to its rightful place on the neck.

My mouth opened wide at that sight; I couldn’t school my attention. However, after locking gazes with Woo Ragi, I hurriedly tried stop my gaping and stared at him awkwardly.

“Can you see now?”

“Huh? Yeah…”

Unexpectedly, the first topic Woo Ragi raised was the state of my eyes. After tilting and massaging the previously cut region of his neck, he pulled at my hands once more. “Then, run.”

“….What? O-Okay!” I clasped his fingers and jumped over the gross, wriggling mass of tentacles. In the midst of that mass was the thing that had taken ‘Seo Dawon’s’ shape–the monster that Woo Ragi had cleaved in two. I deliberately averted my gaze.

* * *

I felt an uncanny sense of deja vu as I ran while holding Woo Ragi's hand–it was as if I'd been here before. It wasn't exactly like the 'subspaces' in vengeful ghost memory, but…

'Isn't this place structured a bit like Koo Hui-seo's house?'

Although the ceiling of the main hall and the walls at both ends of the mansion were in shambles, the outside could still be seen through the holes in the half-collapsed structure–I was reminded of Koo Hui-seo's mansion, with its wing-shaped winder staircases on both sides of the drawing room. I clearly remembered making a mental note because I'd wondered if his mansion resembled the interior of a European castle.

However, I wasn't exactly certain–this place was so incomparably huge compared to Koo Hui-seo's mansion. While gasping and running, I looked into countless rooms and endless corridors.

Woo Ragi said, "Do you remember the monster that had the key in its mouth?"

"Gasp gasp… What did you say?"

"Do you remember the key."

"Ah! Yeah!"

At my confirmation, Woo Ragi pushed me to the opposite side without any notice, right into one of the open doors. When I looked around, I realized that I had entered an ordinary room that had white dust piled everywhere.

Disoriented, I looked back at Woo Ragi. At that moment, I heard a heavy thudding sound–like something had been moving–in the distance. "W-What's that?"

"Be quiet."

"……"

As soon as Woo Ragi placed a finger on my lips to quiet, a dark shadow fell through the room's small window. The room quickly darkened–it was as if a solar eclipse had occurred. The light that had originally filtered through that small window vanished completely.

Worryingly, that sudden change was a result of the giant monster's appearance just outside the window. I held my breath and looked at what little I could see of the monster's body.

"Gasp…!" As the monster bowed its head and one gigantic eye peered through the window, I gasped in surprise. Its pupil was as big as the glass panes.

The sight was so terrible that I couldn't help but freeze in place. However, the monster continued staring at me regardless. It held a ring, with a key attached, in its mouth–I realized then that this must have been what the swordsman was referring to.

'I'm going to die…' No matter what plans I thought up, there was still no way I could survive an encounter with that monster; I needed to run away.

However, Woo Ragi firmly held my hand with a nonchalant, calm expression. Also, strangely enough, the monster only looked into the room from the outside. Though I could see my reflection in its pupils, the monster slowly rolled its eyes inside its sockets to check the room's contents.

Eventually, after observing the room for a long while, the monster rose again and gradually moved away, accompanied by its characteristic thudding sounds. I remained motionless until I could no longer hear it moving; only then did I turn my head stiffly towards the swordsman, "….W-What just happened?"

"I just stealthed us momentarily." With that said, Woo Ragi flung my hands off cold-heartedly. I held my numb palms for a while before I collapsed to the ground–the strength had left my legs. I was just thankful that I hadn't soiled my pants.

“Hey, by the way, did you see the key it held in its mouth?” Woo Ragi asked.

“What?”

“You didn’t see it?” Woo Ragi, in midst of asking if I’d seen the key, started kicking my foot with the tip of his shoe, as if he was bothered that I was still spaced out. I stood at attention because the swordsman seemed to be in a hurry, but I still couldn’t answer. I had no idea what he asked. “What are you asking me about? The key’s shape?”

“There was a jewel embedded in the head of the key.”

“Ah…” I recalled the appearance of the key gripped by the monster’s mouth. When I slowly thought about it, I did seem to have seen a red jewel on the round head of the key–just as Woo Ragi said. It looked like a ruby that had been carved and tumbled into a round shape; it had an impressive black pattern in the middle. At first glance, it looked a bit like a finely carved replica of a crocodile’s eye.

“I saw it…what about it?” I asked.

“It looked exactly like the Seo Dawon-impersonator’s peepers.” [1]

“What?” Even though I wracked my brain, that ‘Seo Dawon’s’ eyes didn’t come to mind. Even after rifling through my memories, all I could recall was how the headless Woo Ragi had asked me to pick up his head.

Expression paling, I blocked my mouth to prevent myself from vomiting; at that sight, Woo Ragi folded his arms across his chest and shot me a contemptful expression. Still, considering how the swordsman had refrained from making a large tantrum, it seemed that he understood my current physical and mental condition.

Woo Ragi skipped past that topic and asked another question in a callous tone. “Then, do you know where we are?”

“W-Who knows…”

“You really don’t know?”

“No, how should I know where this is…” As I said that, I recalled how I’d found this place similar to Koo Hui-seo’s mansion, and my words trailed off.

Woo Ragi wasn’t even surprised at my reaction and said, “You’re the one who made this space, so think quickly: Are there any places or rooms that might help us escape? Or other things like that?”

However, I couldn’t agree with the swordsman’s conclusions. I bluntly asked, “What do you mean?”

“Huh?”

“Why would I make this space?! Are you blaming me again?”

It felt like the swordsman was pushing all the blame on me; however, Woo Ragi calmly answered back, “I meant that Koo Hui-seo contaminated your mind and dropped you into this space. In any case, since this dungeon’s base was formed using the information inside your head, the dungeon’s map must be somewhere in your brain as well.”

“What…?”

“Now that we’ve been here for a while, I understand… All your fears have been gathered here.”

I couldn’t keep up with the flow of conversation and looked dumbfounded. Woo Ragi reached out.

He pointed towards the area under the bed. There was a small skull and a skeletal hand sticking out. I covered my mouth with one hand–it all looked so familiar.

No matter how I looked at it, the hand looked like Lackey’s. The hand, though, was covered with dust as if it hadn’t moved for a long while.

Woo Ragi followed my gaze and confirmed what I was looking at. “While I was carrying around your blind self, I saw several things like that.”

“……”

“And all the paintings hanging in the hallway we ran through were all paintings of you.”

I had nothing to say to that–after all, I hadn’t seen such things. However, I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the hand under the bed.

Woo Ragi was about to say something else, but upon seeing my expression, he approached and dragged me into his embrace instead. Then, he grabbed my head tightly with his hands and forced my eyes to meet his. “Hey, did you think of something when you saw that?”

“N-No….”

“Don’t think about anything weird. Got it?”

“B-But… It just moved…” I said, with a tearful expression on my face.

Woo Ragi’s expression was… he looked incredibly irritated–like he wanted to destroy everything. However, he gritted his teeth and said, “… Turn around, don’t look back, and leave the room.”

I left the room without looking back despite the clacks I could hear behind me. As soon as Woo Ragi slammed the door shut behind him, I could hear something hard crashing against the wall.

Looking at the shaking door, I asked the swordsman who followed me out, “…What should we do now?”

“Dunno. How many times do I have to say I’m not an expert in this field.”

“……”

Woo Ragi's reproach was rather blunt. However, when he saw my tearful eyes, he reluctantly continued, "Can you recall anything about Koo Hui-seo?"

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TL: So sorry for the slightly late chapter! I had a busy day today!

Footnotes

1. (nun kkal) is an informal way to talk about someone's eyes. Though it might be archaic, I thought peepers might be an equivalent localization.

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Chapter 245

Chapter 245

‘….Koo Hui-seo?’ At the swordsman’s words, I tried to recall anything I could about Koo Hui-seo. He made quite the impression on me when we first met…

‘His body was fused with a tree… Huh?’ As soon as I thought that, the garden that stretched out under the hallway window distracted me. The spooky and dreary trees sparsely planted in that garden looked quite strange.

Then, I noticed something important. Usually, under severe windy weather, leaves and branches would sway at a constant speed; however, there was something strange about those trees.

The leaves were stiff and straight, as if they had been glued on, and there was no sign of fallen leaves at the base of the trunks–even though the branches drooped low.

In addition, those branches moved too strangely to call them ‘swaying in the wind.’ The speed was off; instead of swaying with the wind, they rocked against the airflow. Rather than shaking in the wind, it would be more accurate to say that the branches were wriggling as they pleased.

I wore my eyes out trying to observe that phenomenon, when…I remembered Woo Ragi’s reaction when we first entered the mansion. I asked, “Excuse me, when we entered this mansion earlier…were the trees perhaps…a bit weird?”

Woo Ragi listened to my question and stared at me. “Yeah.”

His answer was incredibly simple. Even though he didn't stop to explain further, I could roughly assume how strange the trees would have seemed close-up.

However, the grossness didn't end there. As soon as the swordsman stopped speaking, the trees planted outside, scarily, turned around to look at me. I was appalled by their synchronized movement; goosebumps rising all over my arms, I stepped away from the window.

"Insane…" Fortunately, my eyesight isn't the best, so I couldn't see the distant trees in close detail.

But, it looked like something was wrong with its roots… Rather than mere wood, something strange was tangled in the messy roots. It was as if someone's face was staring at me through the gaps in the underground plant webs. I imagine the reality wouldn't be much different from my imagination. After all, these things looked similar to Koo Hui-seo's original appearance.

'I hate that so much…'

The only thing that was comforting me, right now, was that Koo Hui-seo was immobile when he had been fused with a tree. In that state, those things probably couldn't rush at us. With that in mind, I could finally calm down.

"Are those things related to you?" Woo Ragi looked at the trees' wriggles.

I nodded. "When I first met Koo Hui-seo… It was like a human and a tree were sharing one body."

"And?"

"S-So Seo Dawon and I rescued him."

Woo Ragi opened his mouth as if he had something to say. However, in the end, he said nothing and a short silence enveloped us. Then, he signaled to me with a bob of his chin and walked forward. I hurried behind him.

“Anything else besides that that comes to mind?” he asked.

“Mmmm…” Once again, I groped through my memories.

After we extracted him from the tress, I had seen the ex-chimera be taken away by an ambulance. At that time, I saw the witch’s familiar, a white cat, for the very first time… All that in mind, I hurriedly opened my mouth. “After seeing Chairwoman Shin return home, I came back to my own lodgings.”

“……”

“Mm… Afterwards, I was invited to Koo Hui-seo’s home…” As soon as I said that, I suddenly felt fear. Before I could properly identify the cause, Woo Ragi suddenly turned around and grabbed me. Simultaneously, he pulled me with enough force to dislocate my shoulder.

“Aghh!”

“Duck!” Woo Ragi mercilessly pressed down on my head; helpless, I had no strength to resist. There was no time to complain though. The hallway, far behind us, collapsed; something was rushing at us at a tremendous speed.

Thud, Thud, Th-Thud–!

The passageway, which began to crumble, began dropping to the ground with resounding booms. It probably was more accurate to say that the entire walkway was collapsing. Decorations that were hung everywhere along the walls and overhead lights fell, one after another, as if we were in the midst of an earthquake.

I ran after the swordsman, protecting my head with both arms. “W-What happened…!”

[Nyaaaaan.]

Just then, I heard a charming cat’s meow alongside the sound of something crumbling. As soon as I heard that, I recalled that Woo Ragi told

me one of the stone statues had a cat’s head. Of course, nothing changed just because I recalled that fact. I just ran like crazy to avoid death.

Woo Ragi ran ahead and jumped up the emergency stairs at the corner in one leap; gasping, I took two stairs at a time. The distance between me and the swordsman gradually widened. I clenched my teeth, worried that I might miss a step; perhaps that was foreshadowing, my ankle caught against the stairs. “Ack!”

Suddenly, as soon as I stepped on it, my foot broke through the carpet-covered step. There were signs that the place had been left unattended for a long while–such as the cloudy dust that covered the area, but who would have thought the wooden stairs would have rotted?

I couldn’t go against the force of inertia and ended up falling on the stairs. Woo Ragi, in front, turned straight around and ran towards me. However, something reached me first.

Bang–!

Something slammed into the bottom of the stairs with tremendous force; since my leg was still stuck inside the wooden planks, I couldn’t escape.

“Nnngh–!”As the wooden boards dug into my leg, a scream automatically tore out of my throat. Furthermore, because of the impact, the stairs started to shatter to the ground.

Woo Ragi reached his hands out towards me,”Idiot! Grab my hand!”

“I-I can’t….” I urgently tried to stretch and grasp the swordsman’s hands, but our fingers missed each other narrowly. After that, I began speedily falling backwards. I wondered if I’d die here, but Woo Ragi followed me down the collapsing stairs.

Crash–!

He kicked the wooden board trapping my leg and smashed it. I shed some tears at the flash of pain–had he broken my bones? However, Woo

Ragi dragged me into his embrace without hesitation. Then, kicking the wall, he quickly leaped into the air.

[Nyaa.]

A huge iron mace flew at the swordsman’s back. Judging from the timing and angle, it was unavoidable. No matter how talented Woo Ragi may be, it was impossible to change position midair.

However, Woo Ragi diverted more strength to his arms and bowed over me. Soon afterwards, I heard the eerie sound of bones crushing–the iron mace struck true and hit the swordsman’s back.

“…Are you okay?” I asked.

I could feel the impact through his body, but I somehow didn’t bounce out of his arms. Though Woo Ragi fell downstairs, he barely managed to stand by gaining a foothold on an unbroken step.

I cautiously raised my head to look into his face; the swordsman’s expression looked too unbothered for someone struck by an iron mace.

“Do you think I’d be ‘okay?'”

“S-Sorry…”

Woo Ragi’s brows furrowed, and he stumbled as if he were about to collapse. It was only then I could see the state of his back; shockingly there was a giant hole there. Of course, the exposed cross-section of his innards was colored black, but… the unnatural curve of his battered body was just gruesome.

However, Woo Ragi continued to run without any further delay–the stone cat statue holding the iron mace was still moving, after all. After a long time, we managed to escape and leap out of the cat’s attack zone.

* * *

When the swordsman held his breath, the missing portions of his body were restored speedily. However, I could not say that all was well. Judging from his occasional frowns, he seemed to be in pain despite the external healing show….

Despite that, he ran tirelessly–I felt guilty. However, I couldn't ask him to set me down My right ankle was definitely broken; the swelling was now visible.

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

"Huh? Ah, no…." Actually, there was pressure on my broken ankle due to the way he carried me, but I didn't want to let him know.

Despite my answer, the swordsman slowly corrected his holding posture.

"Th-Than…"

"Agh, Don't speak."

I was going to thank him, but Woo Ragi looked more upset than when his back was impacted. He looked down at me with an expression laden with disgust–it was as if he'd really drop me if I continued to make things awkward for him.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: What a tsundere. Also, I'll make the schedule for this week tomorrow or something >.< I'm a bit busy today.

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Chapter 246

Chapter 246

‘Seriously, his personality is a mess.’

Faced with no choice, I continued to awkwardly cling to him. Woo Ragi descended while holding my silent body.

We were inevitably driven downstairs because the iron-mace-wielding-cat-statue was upstairs. However, due to the mansion’s old and dreary atmosphere, we felt an ominous foreboding as we traveled downstairs.

‘What is this smell…’

Furthermore, the lower we went, the more I smelled something unpleasant. It felt like we were passing by a rotten pond or a swamp. The air was also damp with humidity; the wallpaper on the walls was peeling.

As I observed the walls, I noticed, as the swordsman said, my portraits hanging everywhere…

‘Did I really create this space…?’

Honestly, I felt really strange.

My masterfully painted face hung on the walls at regular intervals; the portraits represented my image from all ages–very young to relatively recent. Of course, although I knew that none of this was ‘real’, I couldn’t help but stop and gawk at every portrait.

‘But why…are all the paintings with Seo Dawon like that…’

Was only Seo Dawon’s painted face blacked out?

The paintings seemed to largely depict me doing something. Judging from the artistic composition, rather than a painting it looked somewhat like a photo. Like…someone stalked me and took a picture whenever something memorable happened.

The ‘me’ inside of the portraits carried Lackey around my neck and was an elementary student looking out the car window from the back of my mother’s car. The chronological order was all mixed up; next to the picture of me on a tricycle was the picture of an injury I received in army service. Next to the portrait depicting my transformation into a User were portraits of the formation of my servant contracts.

But…

‘If this space was created from my memories… then why has Seo Dawon’s face been blotted out?’

Maybe I was being too sensitive about this detail because it was rather creepy. I gave Seo Dawon’s tarnished painting a sidelong glance–anxiety welled within me.

At that moment, Woo Ragi, who had been striding forward, suddenly stopped. Then, he looked straight ahead.

[Useless…]

At first, I had no idea what the swordsman was looking at. However, the swordsman’s echo blades began to fan behind his back, as if he were spreading his wings. It seemed like he noticed something within slowly ambling out in the deep, dark shadow in front of us.

“Can you…see what it is?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“It’s something dangerous, right?”

“I think it’s Chairwoman Shin.”

“What?”

I was surprised by Woo Ragi’s placid answer and focused on the amorphous black lumps in front of me. Chairwoman Shin….That was Koo Hui-seo’s…

[What a disappointment…]

However, no matter how I focused, the thing in front of us didn’t appear to be human. Of course, I expected that to some extent. After all, the way Chairwoman Shin died…

‘Koo Hui-seo snapped her neck…’

My face paled from that traumatic memory.

However, the approaching black shadow wasn’t someone with a broken neck. Rather… it looked like a multi-legged monster–large enough to fill the whole height of the corridor.

I continued to observe the area in front of us; soon, I was able to gauge the black blob’s appearance.

I finally understood why Woo Ragi thought it might be ‘Chairwoman Shin’. The approaching monster had several blue-crab feet embedded into its body. The body itself was made of a mass of black tentacles–like a thick bundle of intertwined thread–like those I’d seen before.

And, Chairwoman Shin’s head was embedded into the center of that body. Just like the last time I saw her, her eyes were all black pupils without the white of the sclera.

Simultaneously, she began incessantly babbling; at a surface glance, it seemed like she was severely rebuking someone.

[You lacking fool… I already said it once before… Why can’t you understand the first time I say things!]

I was stunned by her enormous size and horrifying appearance, but the swordsman calmly positioned the two largest echo blades in front.

“Let’s… Let’s run away,” I said.

“There are monsters to the back too.”

“What?” No matter how I thought about it, that wasn’t an opponent we should fight. I carefully suggested we slip away, but Woo Ragi informed me of another monster’s presence.

Startled, I looked back and found a spider-shaped tentacle monster crawling up above us in the middle of the ceiling. As soon as I looked at it, that ‘thing’ halted in its tracks and observed me with its dozens of eyes.

I whispered to the swordsman, “Since when have they been following us…?”

“Just hug my neck.”

“Okay…”

Of course, Woo Ragi had never docilely answered me. I clung onto his neck with both arms; simultaneously, the spiders creeping up behind us sped up and rushed to our location.

At that moment, Chairwoman Shin began scratching hysterically at her face.

[I’ve had enough of your foolishness!]

“[Maestro].” Woo Ragi controlled his two gigantic echo blades without physically wielding them. One flew at the spiders behind us, and the other flew straight at Chairwoman Shin’s face.

That wasn’t all.

“A-Ack!” I shouted.

Woo Ragi held me in his arms and spun around midair to avoid the chairwoman’s whip-like black tentacles.

Earlier, it had seemed like he couldn’t change position midair, but, looking closer, there were short echo blades underneath his feet, like the steps on a staircase. Using his blade as a stepping stone, Woo Ragi began leaping through the air.

[You’re not my child…]

However, the swordsman’s attacks did not seem to have much effect. Though his echo blade tunneled into Chairwoman Shin’s right eye, she didn’t seem too hurt.

Like a madman, Chairwoman Shin kept muttering with one sword stuck in her eye sockets.

[Where is my son? Hui-seo-yah. My child, my lovely son–you’re not him. My son! Where is he?! You detestable fool; your dirty blood! Someone dull-witted and foolish like you isn’t my son. Die! Die! I incited anger from others…to give birth to you. I was foretold that I would die in misery. However…no–it can’t be. You were special ever since you were in my womb. My clever, intelligent son… My sin, my sacrifice, my last bloodline…]

As she spoke, some of her intertwined and wriggling tentacles split and opened their ‘mouths’ whenever she began another sentence; it was as if her words contained power within them.

Eyelids formed at the ends of tentacles that didn’t split open. They opened their ‘eyes’ at the same time; before long, it seemed like we had stepped into a den of tangled snakes.

“I should have ripped apart her mouth, not her eyes.” Woo Ragi murmured regretfully at that terrible scene. I was grounded by the sound of his voice and was able to endure the urge to faint.

[Kyaaaaaaak!]

Despite the ensuing attacks from the serpents, Woo Ragi was not flustered nor shaken. The snakes were all connected to one torso; heads fanning out with no tails, just like the Medusa from greek mythos. The serpents could only use their heads to bite at their opponents.

As if he found all this monotonous, Woo Ragi avoided each attack with minimal movement; at each opportunity, he manipulated the echo blades behind him to pierce through the serpent heads, one by one. The snakes disappeared when the blade touched them, as if they were burning into ashes. The issue, though, was that the heads reappeared not long afterwards.

‘Woo Ragi isn’t being pushed back, but…’

Nothing good could come from a long-term endurance fight. Though Woo Ragi wouldn’t die, as he was a servant, his skills had cooldown times…

The swordsman must have shared my thoughts; rather than attacking blindly, he began conserving energy and looking for gaps.

The same was true of the spiders rushing from behind. With each slash of the echo blades, the monsters were torn apart, leaving nothing but empty space behind. But, after a few seconds, more spiders continued to push in, and we were surrounded on both sides.

I looked around to try and search for an escape route. Then, I saw a small opening behind a portrait on the wall.

Become a Patron!

TL: This Chairwoman Shin…monster…thing…is so creepy.
Also, lmao, Woo Ragi is struggling without direction >.<

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Chapter 247

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Though the spiders did not approach us hastily, they kept spewing translucent threads from their spinnerets. At first, I was ignorant of their goals, but the skeins of yarn-like threads created spider webs that crept closer to our position in the hallway

At that moment, perhaps to activate a skill, Woo Ragi quickly flung one of his huge echo blades at the spiders. The problem, though, was that the spider webs had, in an instant, completely entangled the sword.

“What the…” Woo Ragi frowned and glared at his sword. When I followed his gaze, I noticed that the sword was floating midair–as if it had been nailed to the spot. At first, I thought the swordsman was using his power to float the weapon, but the strange expression on his face made me wonder if that wasn’t the case.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“……” In lieu of answering, Woo Ragi tensed the arm wrapped around my side. His strength almost crushed my ribs, but he soon lept away with me plastered to his side. Simultaneously, the echo blade Ragi had thrown was suddenly pierced into the ground where we had been standing just moments before. If we had stayed still, it would have penetrated through the tops of our heads.

“Did your sword get stolen?” I asked, bewildered.

“Haah….” Woo Ragi didn’t respond properly, but I needed no explanation–my eyes caught the spider web strands stuck to the echo blade, reflecting in the dim light. Even as the spiders died, the monsters must have gradually attached their webs to the blade that killed them; with enough spiderwebs, his weapon was stolen.

I felt increasingly suffocated in this hapless situation.

It was then.

[Kyaaargh–!]

Something shiny flew at my eyes; before I could avoid it, the swordsman snatched it with his off-hand.

When he unfurled his fist, a sticky, silver liquid flowed down his palm. At first, I panicked at the horrible smell, worrying that it was poison; however, thankfully, the swordsman’s hands did not show signs of being poisoned.

The liquid soon hardened, like candle wax, on his hand. When Woo Ragi noticed the liquid was hardening, he tried to move his fingers. However, his movements became rigid and unnatural, as if his index finger to his ring finger had become affixed.

That wasn’t all.

Whip–!

Woo Ragi suddenly raised his hardened hand, as if it were caught on something. His body began to be pulled with great force towards the swarming arachnids.

Only then were we able to see the transparent web of spider silk attached to his arm. It seemed that the long strands, similar to the strands that held his echo blade hostage, were connected to the ‘adhesive’ on the swordsman’s hands.

“…W-What should we do?” Flustered by the unexpected crisis, I looked up at Woo Ragi.

“There’s not much else I could do.” When we made eye contact, the swordsman looked annoyed; however, his mumbled voice sounded quite casual–at least, on the surface. His mid-sized echo blade–one of the few that wasn’t entangled by spider silk–poked itself into Woo Ragi’s side as if it wanted to be used. I definitely thought Woo Ragi would take the sword in hand, but…

Slice–

The swordsman quickly slashed through his wrist and absentmindedly stomped on his hand rolling on the floor. I froze at the sight, speechless.

Meanwhile, Woo Ragi began to step midair, climbing up the hallway walls on invisible steps, as if he were some stuntman. Consequently, the spiders rushed after him, the monster wearing Chairwoman Shin’s body as a shell reached out to him as well. However, Woo Ragi continued forward by trampling on Chairwoman Shin’s numerous snake heads.

I felt dizzy as I saw him step atop the snakes–their fangs tearing at his long legs. I thought he might gradually lose his balance, but the swordsman paid no heed. He even docilely let a few snakes bite at his thighs or forearms. It was as if he only cared whether or not the snakes touched my body; now ragged, flesh torn, he landed behind Chairwoman Shin’s back.

“This body… I feel like I now have a rough idea of how to use it.”

“…You…You…”

“It’s not so bad being an Undead.” Woo Ragi muttered in a professional, business-like tone and began to run while calmly evaluating his torn body. It seemed like he didn’t want to hear any apologies or concerns from me.

Without another word, I grabbed his clothes and shrugged my head into his embrace. However, our escape route soon encountered a wall shortly

afterwards. The monsters we had failed to get rid of had swarmed together; Woo Ragi came to a sudden stop. “Hey, you can walk by grabbing onto the wall, can’t you?”

“What?” I asked, flustered, before noticing some strange smoke billowing from Woo Ragi’s body–especially the snake-bit regions. The injuries smelled awful.

Astonished, I hurried to escape his arms and tried to quickly observe the bite marks. However, Woo Ragi coldly pushed my hands away and pointed, with his chin, in the direction I needed to go.

“…You’re not poisoned, right?”

“Shut it–I’m fine. Just concentrate. You see that room ahead to the front?”

“Huh? Y-Yeah…”

“Go in there and lock the door.” With that said, Woo Ragi turned his back on me. The echo blades floating behind his back stood upright–like a tombstone. It was as if the blades were promising me that nothing would cross that line of defense.

I hesitated, feeling something foreboding. “But…”

“Don’t be a nuisance.” Still standing with his back to me, Woo Ragi’s usual sour tone sounded somewhat anxious.

‘Well, I suppose… It’s not like anything will change with me here…’

Eventually, after hesitating for a while, I looked at him, turned around, and placed my hand on the walls. At the end of the hallway, there was a room with a flat wooden door. If there was nothing dangerous within that room, then perhaps it would be best to wait there first.

‘Though, if something pops up again, there’s little I can do…’

I took a deep breath and took great efforts to hobble on one foot. Woo Ragi wouldn't die if his throat was slit; even the thought of that was terrible, it wouldn't be a huge deal. Even as I thought that, I felt miserable. I clenched my fist, repressing my desire to look back.

'If only I had the ability…'

It would be possible for me to stand in front of my servants and wouldn't need to spare my body like this. I was relieved that I at least had the Swordsman with me, but if it was just me and Lackey, we would have died while trying to escape the cat statue from earlier.

The frustration that had been piling from before and my own patheticness compounded into anger at myself. If I can return safely from this place…

'First, I won't let Koo Hui-seo be.'

And…

'I'll need to ask Seo Dawon and find something that I can do–my role. Or, perhaps, go through Kim Olim's training.'

With that in mind, I arrived in front of the wooden door. It was heavier than I thought, but the door opened gently, and I was able to slip inside. Only then did I look back at Woo Ragi.

"……!"

I almost screamed at the sight before my eyes. Woo Ragi had been carved to pieces, and Chairwoman Shin was sucking him into her mouth. I started to run towards him but stepped on my bum leg.

Someone, though, pulled me inside the room. When my toes touched the floor and I felt electrifying pain, my body lost balance and collapsed backwards. The thick wooden door completely closed before the swarm of black spiders could reach me.

Crash–!

“No!” I stood up recklessly, enduring the pain in my leg. However, even if I limped to the door and desperately tried to turn the doorknob, the door stayed shut.

‘I have to break it apart…!’

While banging on the door wildly, I thought of a last-resort option.

Soon, though, a thin white hand reached past my ear. I froze–I hadn’t fully realized that someone stood behind me. I shuddered–I couldn’t muster the courage to turn around.

“You mustn’t make noise, Lee-kyung-ssi…”

The owner of that hand–the owner of that familiar whisper–slowly grabbed my hand.

As soon as I heard that voice, anger bubbled within me, and I looked straight back. Behind me stood a young boy staring at me with a tearful expression.

“What on earth…you…”

I was bewildered–that voice was definitely Koo Hui-seo’s! Looking closer, the young child had features that looked similar to the ex-chimera. He was… what a teenage Koo Hui-seo might look like.

“You mustn’t make noises… You mustn’t let mother find you…” Koo Hui-seo ignored my confusion and begged with tears streaming down his face. Then, before I could respond, his thin, fragile hands gripped onto my arms with a robust force that didn’t suit his slight frame.

I tried to shake him off, but, at that moment, I heard something large slam against the door. I retreated one step instinctively, stepping with my unbroken leg. Koo Hui-seo (?) leaned in close with a terrified expression on his face.

Become a Patron!

TL: RIP in peace Woo Ragi. May your beautiful face not be marred.

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Chapter 248

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Creeakk–!

Afterwards, I heard a strange noise originating from the doorknob and started to slowly retreat even further. However, the doorknob soon stilled and no more signs of rattling or turning rang out.

Instead, a faint light flickered from behind the door. Koo Hui-seo grasped at my hands even tighter; it hurt so much that I almost released a groan, but I endured by biting my lower lip.

“……”

“……”

Bang–!

Then, once again, something slammed into the door. As my shoulders flinched, Koo Hui-seo burrowed into my arms. I wanted to push him away, but I couldn’t afford to do that in this situation.

A long while later, a welcome voice greeted me from outside the door.

[Choi Lee-kyung].

Woo Ragi’s voice.

I went straight to the door and tried to open it. I last saw him being swallowed by a monster, but he must have quickly revived and ran away– like when he had been beheaded.

However, Koo Hui-seo was faster. He heard the voice, blocked my mouth, and dragged me back with incredible strength. I couldn't beat him in a physical competition. With my eyes, I asked what he was doing, but Koo Hui-seo, hands still clamped over my mouth, started shaking his head desperately.

[Answer me. Are you inside? Open the door.]

"You mustn't open the door…"

[……]

Koo Hui-seo whispered into my ears in a barely audible voice. I wanted to push him away, but the desperate expression and the strange cold feeling from outside the door stayed my actions.

It was then–

[Choi Lee-kyung. Choi Lee-kyung? Choi Lee-kyung. Choi Lee-kyung…? Lee-kyung-ah.]

"……"

[Lee-kyung-ah, open the door.]

The voice calling out to me suddenly started changing every second. At first it was Woo Ragi's voice, but soon it changed to Kim Olim's. Like a glitchy recording, a mechanical voice flowed out.

Then, at the end, I could hear Seo Dawon's voice. The voice was further away from the door, as if the thing had faltered while trying to control its vocal cords. Koo Hui-seo supported my weight as we stepped backwards together.

We stood for a while like that–the shadow that could be seen through the gap underneath the door disappeared. It was as if that thing had been waiting for that entire pause. In addition, with the shadow's disappearance, the strange chill I felt began to fade as well. Only then could I release the breath I had been holding in one deep gasp. "Haah, haah…"

"L-Lee-kyung-ssi… Over here." Before I could rest, Koo Hui-seo dragged me away from my short break. The emaciated cheeks that revealed sharp cheekbones and eyes laden with anxiety still lingered on the young Koo Hui-seo's face.

Because I could never read Koo Hui-seo's emotions so clearly on his face as an adult, that difference–the openness–made the child before me so unfamiliar. It was as if I was gazing upon someone that merely looked similar.

I could not resolve this unfamiliar situation and anxiety over whether or not I could follow Koo Hui-seo in this situation. Nothing seemed to work as it should in this place.

However, Koo Hui-seo must have assumed I wasn't following him for another reason. He looked at me nervously, bit his fingernails, and soon asked with a shocked expression, "L-Lee-kyung-ssi's leg…! Why is your leg like that?!"

His gaze alternated between my swollen leg and my face before quickly kneeling down at my feet.

I felt flustered, but the sight of Koo Hui-seo's skinny back shut my mouth. He was wearing an exceedingly thin t-shirt; when he bent over, I could clearly see his bare skin underneath that cloth.

Koo Hui-seo stammered and continued, as if he were ignorant to my stares, "F-For now, you should get on my back… I can carry you…"

"……"

“Why aren’t you getting on? I-I… I’m really only going to give you a piggy-back ride.”

“……”

“…Lee-kyung-ssi?”

“……”

“L-Lee-kyung-ssi, can you not move even that short distance? Are you in great pain? Nnnngh… What should I do?” Koo Hui-seo shot darting glances at the door, fidgeting, when I didn’t move. He even tried to cautiously pull at my sleeve.

After he urged me several times, I was able to swallow my pooling saliva and asked, “Koo Hui-seo-ssi, your back…”

“Yes?”

“…What’s wrong with your back?”

“My back?” Koo Hui-seo fumbled around his back as if he had no idea what I was talking about. “Ah, oh…”

Then, after he realized I was referring to the gruesome scar on his back, a short, solemn silence flowed between us. As if he were walking on eggshells, he cautiously looked at me and answered with a distorted smile, “Th-This is… where Mother hit me a while ago.”

“……”

“The bleeding has stopped now… So, you can climb onto my back.”

“……”

“I’m serious. A-Are you unable to touch it because it looks so disgusting? However, Lee-kyung-ssi, you won’t be able to run away on that leg…”

I forgot what I was going to say and could only look at Koo Hui-seo's desperate face. In the end, I was forced to carefully clamber onto his back.

It may be true that Koo Hui-seo was beaten before, but he was able to raise my weight and straighten his knees without a groan. He rose from his prone position, carrying me on his back, pressing hard against my thighs with his arms. Like that, he started running into a new room–just across the hallway.

Tap, tap, tap…

The sound of bare feet hitting the marble floor echoed softly throughout the hallway. Koo Hui-seo often stumbled because the weight was a little too much to handle, but, still, the boy progressed at a fast pace.

I buried my face into his back, peering at the large and small paintings that hung in the hallway.

I wasn't the painting's subject this time around. The painted man was Koo Hui-seo–the backgrounds were all terrible. Scenes of Koo Hui-seo's past–such as dangling soldering irons from his tongue, Chairwoman Shin standing behind him with a whip, or plunging the young Hui-seo into a lake–were depicted in stark clarity.

"Gasp, gasp…"

"…If you're having a hard time, you can just support my weight as I walk."

"No…! M-My room is just over there…" Koo Hui-seo shook his head stubbornly even though his neck was drenched with sweat. That made me realize that Woo Ragi, who had even used his skills while carrying me on his back, was quite extraordinary. At the same time though, my heart felt heavy when I recalled the last time I saw the swordsman.

Meanwhile, Koo Hui-seo clenched his teeth and managed to arrive at the small room at the edge of the corner while carrying me atop his back. He opened the door, placed me on the bed, and sprawled out on the floor.

I watched Koo Hui-seo sweat buckets for a short while before turning my gaze out the window. I could immediately see a round lake and a beautiful, forested garden. “Koo Hui-seo-ssi. How can I escape this place?”

By the time I turned my attention towards the ex-chimera again, he stared back with a pale expression. He looked like he had something to say.

It was a strange expression on his face–one mixed with awe and anxiety. I looked at him quietly without rushing him; Koo Hui-seo shed tears while staring at my face. After big droplets fell–wiped by his sleeves–the floodgates opened, and he began to bawl.

‘Why is he crying?’

I observed him, feeling a little bewildered and uncomfortable. At that moment, Koo Hui-seo began to talk again, bowing his head as if he had committed a crime. “That’s…”

“Yes?”

“A-Actually, I’ve also made great efforts to escape this place…”

“……”

However, after that, he fell silent for a long while again. I didn’t want to rush him, but honestly my legs were now numb and my body was just so tired.

Koo Hui-seo stared at my exhausted face as he continued speaking with that pleading voice. The issue, though, was that his words came out as babbles. I frowned and had to cut him off, “Say it again–what did you say?”

“…That is to say… We can’t leave..”

“…What did you say?”

“W-With my strength… We can’t leave… Sorry… I’ve been looking for a way out, but…”

I didn’t mean to interrogate him, but it seemed like my questions just filled him with more guilt. Of course, when I think about the reason we fell into this ‘place,’ I suppose it’s true that the fault laid in Koo Hui-seo…

‘It doesn’t seem like he intended for this to happen though… Something dire must have happened before he managed to barge into my home.’

I didn’t want to forcibly ask him to explain himself, but Koo Hui-seo’s attitude was deeply frustrating. He seemed way too depressed and hopeless for someone who intended this sort of situation.

Of course, though our dilemma may be unintentional, it was still annoying. I really wanted to hit him. However, my priority would be to find a small clue to solve the problem rather than to strike someone who wouldn’t even rebel anyway.

I had no choice but to beckon the ex-chimera closer. Koo Hui-seo approached hesitatingly while wiping away his tears. I tried not to be annoyed by the way he shuffled forward, like a worm.

In the end, Koo Hui-seo sat down on the mattress a small distance away from me.

Become a Patron!

TL: D: D: The voice-changing scene scared me. Like, Nope! Def not becoming a User.

Also, how is Koo Hui-seo simultaneously the most contemptible but pitiable man.

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Chapter 249

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“Don’t cry and speak slowly. What’s going on?”

“…That’s…” Koo Hui-seo slowly continued to speak as he rubbed at his tear-laden eyelashes. “That day, Kyungman-ie… his condition suddenly worsened. He kept throwing up whatever I fed him… So.”

“Ah.” I had forgotten about Koo Hui-seo’s brother for a while, though his words made me recall the guy. Rather, it’s more accurate to say I recalled the guy’s demise more than his face.

When I remembered that terrible scene, my brows furrowed, but I tried to calmly look into the ex-chimera’s eyes.

Perhaps he understood my silent urging; Koo Hui-seo hurriedly began to speak again, “S-So… I was going to call a doctor…”

“But?”

Before answering my question, Koo Hui-seo adopted a miserable expression. His desperate bearing reminded me of a man whose precious property was stolen from him.

But, he soon wiped away his tears and confessed, eyes downcast, “I was flustered… while the attending physician was on his way, I let him out of the bed briefly…”

“……”

“At that moment… I think…Kyungman-ie tried to take his life.”

“……”

“Perhaps he knew that, unless he did something now, he wouldn’t be able to avoid giving [birth]…”

So…It seems like Koo Kyungman tried to escape his situation while Koo Hui-seo was momentarily careless.

Although my relationship with Koo Kyungman was terrible, his situation was honestly worthy of sympathy from any human being. If I were him, I would have gone insane far earlier.

However, Koo Hui-seo’s expression tugged at my heart when the other talked about Koo Kyungman’s attempt at death… The ex-chimera seemed ignorant of his own desperate expression. So, I asked him a pointless question, “Did Koo Kyungman-ssi die?”

“…No. He hasn’t died.”

“Then, perhaps… were you feeling guilty?”

“What?”

“That is to say… Koo Kyungman-ssi is your younger brother. Well… things don’t work out necessarily exactly the way you want them to go. Your emotions…”

However, contrary to my expectations, Koo Hui-seo blinked as if he couldn’t understand me. His expression strangely reminded me of Lackey– perhaps I shouldn’t have said anything.

To be honest, if he had any human heart left, he would have killed his brother sooner. Giving Koo Kyungman death now would be like an apology.

‘Then, why does he have such a sorrowful expression?’ I glared at Koo Hui-seo’s pallid face.

He still looked blank, as if he could read nothing from my glare, and suddenly asked, “Do you think I regret this?”

“……”

I had no answer to his question. This time, I was the one who was struck speechless, so I simply shrugged. Koo Hui-seo must not have expected much of a response either–he didn’t dig any further into that line of thought.

Soon, an awkward silence fell between us. Fortunately, this disquieting calm didn’t last long.

“Excuse me. Then… Then, Hui-seo-ssi must have stopped Koo Kyungman from dying, then… What happened after that?” I asked after some reflection.

Koo Hui-seo’s shoulders flinched, as if his mind was on other things, before replying meekly, “Ah, yes… I tried to stop Kyungman-ie, but he suddenly attacked me…”

His answer was quite flooring–I was surprised that Koo Kyungman had enough energy to resist. Cutting off the ex-chimera, I flung further questions at him. How on earth did he attack? Perhaps it’s a bit strange to point this out, but he had no limbs to attack with…the only thing that could move on that body was the neck. Did he tear at the ex-chimera with his teeth? “Koo Kyungman attacked Hui-seo-ssi? How…”

“…Kyungman-ie understands my unique constitution well.” Koo Hui-seo closed his mouth with a complicated smile, as if he didn’t want to explain any further. Of course I wanted to probe and learn more, but Koo Hui-seo cut me off. “Anyway… I still overpowered Kyungman-ie.”

“…..Right.”

“In the end, I ended up falling asleep as well.” With that said, rubbed his face several times as if he somehow blamed himself for acting foolishly.

Of course, I couldn't understand anything with that sort of explanation–I shot him a curious look. Annoyingly, as soon as he and I locked gazes, Koo Hui-seo began to match the timing of his blinks to mine. Faced with the impenetrable wall of the ex-chimera's lack of perception and tact, I had to interrogate him further. "…Excuse me, what's wrong with sleeping? You've already overpowered Koo Kyungman… or did your brother have an accomplice there? Actually, if you said you slept, how did you walk all the way over to my home?"

"Ah." Perhaps Koo Hui-seo finally understood my confusion, he continued to explain, "Actually, I stabbed myself with a knife…to try and wake up."

"……"

"I accidentally cut myself too deep… I thought I would die. Just then, I thought, 'wouldn't Lee-kyung-ssi have a solution?' So…"

"……"

"But, by the time I arrived at Lee-kyung-ssi's dorm, I was already almost half-asleep. My memories are quite fuzzy. I probably caused you much trouble before the fuse of my consciousness snuffed out, but… I wasn't in a good enough condition to explain or argue about anything…"

Of course, his words were still incoherent. As soon as I crossed my arms across my chest, Koo Hui-seo nervously rolled his eyes and fidgeted, "Uh, mm… I shouldn't fall into deep sleep."

"…Why?"

"When I sleep deeply, I have nightmares." Koo Hui-seo tapped his head with his index finger. "That wouldn't be a problem when I'm in a good condition. However, when I'm not…"

"……"

“I’ll fall asleep for a long while. Well…that’s normally not a huge deal, but…”

“Uh huh…”

“Because your blood and mine have mixed together, things have gotten complicated. It’s gotten…worse.”

My mood slightly dampened because I felt like he was blaming me; in any case, I felt like I was slowly grasping what the ex-chimera was trying to say.

If I understood correctly, [Koo Hui-seo has nightmares when in a horrid physical condition–the tussle with Koo Kyungman led to that condition. Therefore, before he could fully fall asleep, he came to me for help].

‘…Wait a minute. Why would someone try to hurt themselves in order to wake up just because of a nightmare?’

Furthermore, it’s unbelievable to think he could sweep others around him into his nightmares.

Naturally, I had never experienced this sort of situation before, and Koo Hui-seo’s attitude caught my eye. I pondered what was so strange when suddenly an idea occurred to me.

‘Does Koo Hui-seo know what sort of state his body is in?’

Most ill folk may not realize how broken down their bodies are.

I recalled Kim Olim and Seo Dawon’s conversation when Koo Hui-seo had first arrived at my house. The ex-chimera was not a normal human, and his mentality was different from normal modes of thought. I’m not particularly knowledgeable about mental illnesses, but even I could tell the man was short-sighted and cruel.

Therefore, it was hard to take Koo Hui-seo’s babbles at face value. Rather, perhaps it’d be more accurate to say that the ex-chimera didn’t

understand his situation either and constructed child-like theories based on his short-sighted judgment.

“May I ask why you don’t want to have nightmares? You must be incredibly scared of falling asleep if you’re willing to scar yourself to chase it away.” I asked him another question to confirm my theories.

Koo Hui-seo’s pupils began rolling around as he stammered significantly and rambled. “M-Mother appears… Also, I’m alone…”

“……”

“….Ah! Also, if I’m injured in my nightmares, the injuries are still there when I open my eyes… C-Come to think of it, Lee-kyung-ssi has broken his leg… S-Sorry.”

“……It’s alright. Disregarding that…you said that injuries attained in the nightmare appear in real life as well?”

“Ye~es….”

As I looked into Koo Hui-seo’s vacant eyes, I was certain. ‘This place… It’s a place made from Koo Hui-seo’s [skills].’

Before he was trapped in the hospital, he was the next guildmaster of the Red Dragon Guild; he must have been a User.

‘Though, it seems like his memories of his time as a User have either dissipated or distorted…’

Since the body remains intact, perhaps he was able to access his old skills?

Become a Patron!

TL: It’s interesting! A lot of you picked up on the fact Woo Ragi’s explanation of this scenario doesn’t really fit. As Ragi said, he’s not really the brains of the operation. I really wanted to talk about it in the previous chapters, but I think it’s a conversation best fit for this chapter! I agree with Lee-kyung and you guys–there’s an element of Lee-kyung here but it’s more because of Koo Hui-seo. This is definitely ‘His’ world.

Also…Oh god…Every time I’m reminded of Koo Kyungman, I’m just D: D: D:

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Of course, Chairwoman Shin came to mind during this conversation. Koo Hui-seo must have suffered from Chairwoman Shin's curse, but she was already dead.

Besides, Koo Hui-seo was the one who killed her. No matter how great her skills may be, even skills have time limits. After the time limit passes, the skill cannot be used again until the cooldown period ends. A Witch's curse may be a little different from other ordinary skills, but those curses still cannot be maintained if the User dies.

That was why I concluded that Koo Hui-seo must have been using his own skills. Of course, it didn't seem like he was consciously aware; as a mentally ill person, he might not even realize that he's hurting himself.

"Koo Hui-seo-ssi."

"Yes…"

"This nightmare…when did it begin? Have you had these sorts of dreams since you were a child?"

Koo Hui-seo raised his chin, as if he were about to nod at my question, but stayed silent. His eyes became murky. "I-I don't know…" He shook his head, unable to hide his confused expression.

"Then, when was the last time you had this sort of dream?"

“….Uh…” Koo Hui-seo kept stuttering, like a glitchy machine, and I was convinced. This was part of Koo Hui-seo’s skills. And these skills must have been greatly influenced by his mother, Chairwoman Shin. Before, he was able to escape straight away since he had use of his own skills, but something must have become twisted after the ex-chimera lent me his blood to use in the Vengeful Ghost contract.

To verify this theory, I grabbed Koo Hui-seo’s–who was still plunged deep in worried contemplation–attention. “Hui-seo-ssi. Please look at me for a moment.”

“Ah, yes…” Koo Hui-seo stared at me with his pale face. I reached out to him; the ex-chimera didn’t retreat and simply stayed docilely still.

I touched his icy hands, “Would you come a bit closer?”

“……”

Then, I pulled cautiously at his hand. Koo Hui-seo slowly leaned his upper body to my front.

When Koo Hui-seo’s nape was almost touching my nose, I smelled a faint odor that I had not noticed before. I placed my face near his collarbone to check that smell.

“L-Lee-kyung-ssi…” the ex-chimera stuttered.

“Stop talking and stay still.” I said sternly, chastising him for squirming for no reason. Then, Koo Hui-seo waited motionlessly, like a taxidermy butterfly.

To my surprise, though, the room slowly began to fill with that stench. It was as if he had been consciously suppressing that smell. It was similar to what I had smelt just before we were transported to this place–the nauseating stench of a corpse that had been burning for a long while.

Fortunately, after one strong blare, the scent disappeared as if it had been washed away. However, when I opened my eyes, I could see the black

tentacles behind Koo Hui-seo's back clearly.

I was surprised, though I had expected this. Just before I was dragged into this nightmare, I remembered that the servants were sensitive to my statement that I had smelled something horrid. So…belatedly, the thought that this may all be connected had burrowed into my mind.

However, putting aside such bitter expectations, I piped up with questions I wanted to ask the ex-chimera. "…Hui-seo-ssi. Are you really alive?"

"What? P-Probably…"

"…Haah." As soon as I heard Koo Hui-seo's dumb answer, a sigh of relief naturally escaped from my mouth. Someone who's actively trying to harm me probably wouldn't be that stupid…

'Plus, those tentacles don't look like they're in the best condition… I don't think they can move.'

The limp pile of tentacles hanging from Koo Hui-seo's back looked to be in a similar state to my broken ankle–droopy and just stuck onto his body… So I let go of Koo Hui-seo's hand and pushed away his upper body, which was still leaning close towards me, and asked, "The tentacles behind your back–are they hurt?"

"Ah… Can you see them clearly now?"

"Yes."

"I guess, it hurts a little…?" Koo Hui-seo answered with a slightly happy, vacant look on his face. I had no idea what he found so enjoyable about being hurt, but… I reached and tapped the tip of those tentacles. "Does it hurt if I hit it like this?"

"No…"

"Did they break or get injured?"

“Mm, I suppose the longest tentacles, on the top, are broken…” He fiddled with two tentacles that stretched over his shoulder.

I reached out to the ex-chimera’s shoulder, slow enough so that he could see my approach. Koo Hui-seo didn’t even put up any defenses as I grabbed that thick tentacle. He was meek and docile–as if he’d allow himself to be beaten even if I were to twist and wring his tentacles.

I touched it gently, and Koo Hui-seo’s cheeks colored an unpleasant red. Though I wanted the other to mind his expressions, the tentacles must have had sensitive nerves, so I simply ignored Koo Hui-seo.

After briefly touching the strands like that, I could see him flinch when I stroked closer to his waist.

< ‘It seems like they’re broken here’

While checking the injury, I asked, “Will they heal if we just leave them like this? Can you recover?”

“It’ll probably take some time…?” Once again, Koo Hui-seo gave a vague answer. Then, suddenly, he grabbed at my forehead with a cold hand without permission.

I reflexively and sharply slapped at his hand. “What are you doing!”

At my reaction, Koo Hui-seo flinched, as if he were a scolded child. He replied, evasively, “L-Lee-kyung-ssi looks like he has a fever… I was simply trying to measure your temperature…”

“What?”

“Since Lee-kyung-ssi has a broken leg…aren’t you also in pain?”

I felt a little embarrassed because I seemed to have overreacted; even so, I didn’t want Koo Hui-seo to willfully touch my body. So, I said coolly, “No matter what happens, don’t touch me until I give permission.”

“……”

“Do you understand?”

“…Yes…” Koo Hui-seo looked gloomy and pitiful, but I’ve long been trained out of falling prey to such expressions by living with Lackey, who utterly adored taking walks.

I didn’t placate him and cut straight to the heart of the matter, “How long will it take for you to recover?”

“…When broken tentacles are plucked out, a new one will grow in its place after a few minutes…”

When I heard Koo Hui-seo’s answer, my brows naturally furrowed.

Honestly, was this a potted bonsai or something? Would it grow new buds when pruned? Furthermore, it seemed like the tentacles were connected through the nervous system. Didn’t the guy blush just because I touched him a little earlier?

“Is it okay for these things to be cut? It’ll probably hurt.” However, I was in a hurry, so I blurted out more questions.

As expected, Koo Hui-seo merely nodded. “It’ll be alright…”

“……” Of course I knew it wouldn’t be just ‘alright,’ but we were in a situation that needed his sacrifice; besides, Koo Hui-seo never hesitated. He placed a hand on one of the thick tentacles that stretched over his shoulder.

Riiiiiip–

After a vivid sound, a bundle of tentacles from the right shoulder fell to the floor and wriggled around. On his body, where the roots of the tentacles were plucked, a thick black oil-like liquid–quite unlike human blood–burst forth.

However, the black blood soon stopped flowing and something that seemed like a black horn began to grow. In the following few seconds, the tentacles grew back.

The problem was Koo Hui-seo’s complexion.

He bit his lower lip as if he were in extreme pain; his fingers trembled as he brought his hand to his left shoulder. I thought about saying something, but I ended up closing my mouth again–after all, I was the one asking for his sacrifice in the first place.

Rriip–

Once again, that vivid sound rang out. In the end, Koo Hui-seo couldn’t endure and collapsed onto the bed. I felt extremely sorry for that twitching, skinny back.

“……” I hesitated and placed my hand on the newly sprouted tentacles. Koo Hui-seo, still laying on his stomach, turned his head in astonishment as soon as he felt my touch. After staring at me, he gave me a pouty look, “Why can L-Lee-kyung-ssi…touch me…without asking for permission…”

Perhaps my scummy words earlier made a lasting scar on his psyche. However, in lieu of answering, I simply stroked the back of his head. “If you don’t like it, then tell me not to touch you like I did,” I said, shamelessly.

Koo Hui-seo pursed his lips but did not tell me to remove my hand. He continued to act like a baby to me until his pain died down. Only when I pinched the new bundle of tentacles did he rise up to his feet.

Become a Patron!

TL: I wonder if hamster has a low enough self-esteem that the idea that

someone can be sexually interested in him is foreign or if he’s consciously rejecting that possibility–at least with Koo Hui-seo.

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It got a little easier after a while. The new tentacles acted like the ex-chimera had grown a new limb. These tentacles not only lifted me easily but also had a positive effect on Koo Hui-seo's physical condition. I could hardly believe that the guy was reeling and stumbling about earlier.

His pale complexion had improved a lot as well; he showed no signs of stumbling while running. Furthermore, it seemed like his senses became enhanced after regrowing his tentacles.

"Mother is at the stairs…" He observed a small staircase at the distant end of the corridor before moving by gripping the walls with his tentacles. Then, he climbed out the window and crawled along the outer walls.

Koo Hui-seo's previous escape attempts from his [nightmare] informed how we left the room and traveled. As soon as the ex-chimera recovered, I asked how he was able to escape this nightmarish trap.

"There are several exits."

"Several?"

"The key, safely reaching the basement of this mansion… There are various escape methods." According to him, everything that could be meaningful in this location was an escape hint.

Though now Koo Hui-seo could use his tentacles, it would be a suicide mission to run at the key-bearing monster while carrying me and my broken

leg.

Furthermore, Koo Hui-seo said that he had only once recovered the key to wake up from his nightmares. That instance was more like a coincidence as well–the gigantic monster had been asleep.

‘So, there are various conditions to fulfill to wake him up…’

It seemed that there wasn’t one singular method, like passing college entrance exams. One could have good grades or good recommendations–something like that. I thought this was somewhat strange, but that’s what Koo Hui-seo insisted. [1]

In addition, Koo Hui-seo had already tried another method, but that resulted in needing to hide and nursing his broken tentacles. He confessed that his negative memories intensified when our blood mixed. While I strangely felt like I was being blamed again, I simply ignored him.

‘If that’s the case, nothing good comes from being involved with Koo Hui-seo for me as well.’

Of course, it was great that we were able to catch Koo Kyungman and enact revenge, but that resulted in trauma I’d never be able to forget. I asked the ex-chimera what his usual escape route was.

He said, “If you go down to the basement without getting caught, there’s a huge door…”

“Right.”

“Once I open that, I wake up.”

Since then, Koo Hui-seo has begun sneaking around the building.

The path to the basement, though, could not be found by just blindly going downstairs. We needed to find the secret passage leading to the underground structure. Honestly, even this aspect was so similar to a dungeon.

So, we went from place to place, touching anything that seemed unusual. During that time, whenever we found a patrolling(?) monster, we hid or ran away. Once again, Koo Hui-seo's tentacles were a tremendous help here.

'It's become hard again…'

When something strange approached us, his tentacles, which fluttered behind him malleably, suddenly became rigid and pointed.

Though I was pressed against those tentacles, the change wasn't abrupt enough to hurt me; however, it was useful in instantly conveying the presence of something dangerous. I didn't know how it detected the enemy (perhaps it was instinct); in any case, its monster-detection services were certainly beneficial.

I looked at Koo Hui-seo as soon as the tentacles began to harden again. He was picking at the carpet in the hallway. As soon as I gave the signal, his tentacles moved, and we crept up the ceiling.

[Young master, where are you? Young master, the Chairwoman is looking for you…]

A few minutes later, a woman with flowing black hair walked to our original location.

Behind her, drooping shadows–like melted taffy–flickered and moved about like a burning flame. Black hands popped out of the shadows and began groping everywhere in the hallway. If we were still there, it probably would have latched onto our ankles and kept us from running away.

When the unidentified woman disappeared and we lowered ourselves from the ceiling, I asked Koo Hui-seo, "Who was that woman?"

"She was the nanny who took care of me until I was seven years old…" Koo Hui-seo answered placidly. He did not, however, offer up any additional information.

'Why on earth would a mere nanny be so powerful?'

So, I asked again, “Why is the nanny appearing in your nightmares?’

“She’d often…hit me when my parents weren’t around…”

“……” Though I somewhat expected that response, I was still struck speechless.

While sneaking around the mansion and avoiding monsters, I had already found out that Koo Hui-seo had a horribly unfortunate past.

The mansion itself was grim and grotesque, but that was nothing compared to the patrolling monsters. In addition to that nanny we had just encountered, there were also young twin monsters that passed by; Koo Hui-seo said that there were his cousins.

The twins had no eyes or noses and only had a slitted smile. They ran at a tremendous speed, the coffin attached behind them clattered as they moved. When I inquired about their presence, the ex-chimera said that they’d meet at his home during the holidays during his childhood. They would lock Koo Hui-seo in a warehouse or some storage box and wouldn’t let him out.

In this nightmare, all the bullies and bullying he encountered appeared as monsters. After confirming this observation, I asked something I had been curious about for a while. “By the way… Didn’t Koo Kyungman harass you?”

“Kyungman-ie?”

“Yes. I feel a bit bad for saying this, but… I thought Koo Kyungman would appear as a monster as well.”

I thought the former Red Dragon guild leader would have been a harsher bully than any of the monsters here, but the guy surprisingly didn’t appear.

Koo Hui-seo wriggled his tentacles and adopted an ambiguous smile. After much thought, he hesitatingly said, “Kyungman-ie…bullied me

because he hated me…”

“……? Does that somehow make a difference?”

“There’s a difference between despising me and bullying me for no reason…”

I wondered what he meant by that, but I simply closed my mouth.

We went through the hall and entered another room. The room was cluttered with three laundry racks filled with dusty towels, mops, and other cleaning tools. It felt like a warehouse for the servants.

We scoured the room. Secret passages to basements were usually in unassuming locations.

I asked Koo Hui-seo for specifics on what the passage may look like, but he shook his head. Just like how dreams may be fuzzy and I may not remember everything in detail, he didn’t remember much of the hints he had received in previous nightmares. Therefore, we struggled blindly.

However, while rifling through the towels, Koo Hui-seo continued to talk to me. “Lee-kyung-ssi is the first person to not bully or hate me.”

His deeply moved tone bothered me. A sigh naturally tumbled from my mouth. I wanted to retort, ‘Your childhood was unnatural–a 0.00001 percent chance of a bad hand,’ to soothe the goosebumps that rose all over my arms.

“I don’t know what you’re thinking, but… I’m not some great person for treating you like this. Koo Hui-seo-ssi’s family was weird…That is to say–“

“Before I met Lee-kyung-ssi, I thought everyone hated me because I was odd…”

My hands paused for a brief moment. This mansion was so miserable I couldn’t possibly retort that the ex-chimera *_was indeed_* odd. If I were born in this sort of environment, I may not be worse off than Koo Hui-seo, but I wouldn’t have been able to lead a normal life. Or, I’d probably just run away from home… “Koo Hui-seo-ssi, you should have just ran away.”

“Hehe…”

“Or you could have fought back…”

“Of course, I fought a lot as well…” Koo Hui-seo replied with a discouraged tone; it was clear that he didn’t manage to land a proper blow.

I looked back. Koo Hui-seo stood amidst a pile of white towels; the ex-chimera was busy rifling through other locations. However, the tentacles must have sensed my gaze, the ex-chimera quickly met my gaze. “What is it?”

“I’m just wondering if you had anyone you liked…Ah, you’re prohibited from talking about me.”

“Then, no…” Koo Hui-seo replied cheerfully.

“So burdensome.” I didn’t want him to depend on me. So, I cut him off with a metaphorical knife; the ex-chimera simply giggled and smiled.

However, before long, his smile vanished. The same was true for me as well. I felt Koo Hui-seo’s tentacles harden again. We scrambled through the window to the outside wall–the door opened just barely afterwards.

Monsters swarmed, pushing against each other, into the room. I couldn’t help but sigh. Until when must we keep playing hide-and-seek?…

“So… Do the monsters usually come to find us this fast? I feel like they’re getting faster.”

“No… It’s a bit too intense this time. It’s as I’ve said: I can’t escape alone this time around…” Koo Hui-seo said, rubbing his head against mine as if he were blaming me.

As I pushed his head away with all my might, I thought, ‘We’re missing something…’

Become a Patron!

TL: His childhood D:

The fact that he mentally classifies Koo Kyungman as ‘not a nightmare’ because he had a “good” reason to bully him…. oh my god.

Footnotes

1. Lmao, things might have changed since I was last in Korea, but the entrance exam is a major part of what determines your college entry in Korea… So, Lee-kyung is a little off here haha TT_TT

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However, after we finally searched through every room on this floor, I could draw a conclusion. “I don’t think…”

“Yes…”

“…we’ll be able to leave through the basement, right?”

“There are still other floors to search…” Koo Hui-seo answered belatedly with a lukewarm attitude, but his answer inspired no hope. The situation was certainly on the despairing end of the spectrum.

Every time we searched through a room, the time the monsters waited before they invaded us was getting shorter and shorter. In the end, we only had about five minutes of leisure time to investigate. In addition, more and more monsters Koo Hui-seo didn’t recognize began to be mixed in.

The rooms’ appearances were a problem as well. I felt an unpleasant sense of deja vu that we were repeatedly searching the same room. All this taught me one thing: the nightmare was warning us not to do anything foolish.

‘Furthermore, the sound of the key is getting louder… Although, we can’t see the monster.’

The key could be heard outside. In other words, there was a growing possibility that we’d be caught in between monsters while trying to avoid the enemies that barged into the rooms by climbing out the window.

Moreover, the sound seemed to suggest that the key would be the only way out. We had to make a decision.

“Hui-seo-ssi.”

“Yes…”

“About the monster with the key. Can we defeat him?”

Koo Hui-seo blatantly stared at my legs in lieu of answering. The swelling was worse than before; now, even to the naked eye, my feet looked useless. Though it didn’t hurt as much as I’d expected it to, that didn’t mean my legs were working properly.

I followed his gaze to check my leg’s condition and leaned against the window sill, frowning. With this leg, I wouldn’t be able to do much except to cling onto Koo Hui-seo’s back. I was fed up with this familiar helpless feeling.

‘Think, Lee-kyung, think! I can’t just sit around like this forever.’

At that moment, my brows furrowed as I looked out the window. I looked towards the main gate–where Woo Ragi and I passed earlier. There, I could see dry, barren land spreading out between the gaps made by the trunks of these strange trees that shone gloomily in the sunset.

While looking at the endless horizon, I suddenly thought, “If we leave the house and go into that wilderness, will we be able to escape this dream?’

“Hui-seo-ssi, have you ever woken up by going through the garden?”

“…No.”

I had asked, just in case, but I already knew that route would be difficult. So, I gave up on that method quickly; however, I suddenly had a crazy idea. ‘We’re about five or six floors up from the ground. What would happen if we jumped from here…?’

Maybe, like other nightmares, Koo Hui-seo would wake up in cold sweat after falling from a great height.

“Ugh…!” But, as soon as I thought that, a gust of wind flew over my seat on the sill. That wind wasn’t one that would normally blow into a four-walled room–it felt strong, like the winds that might blow at the edge of a cliff.

Furthermore, I was almost swept out the window by the strange gust of wind; even stranger, the window, which had been closed and intact until recently, had disappeared.

Now that the window frame and panes had vanished, I had almost lost balance and fell out of the open hole in the wall. If Koo Hui-seo did not quickly wrap his tentacles around my waist, I would have crashed to the ground.

“Lee-kyung-ssi! What are you doing?” he shouted.

“No, the window suddenly…!” Disconcerted, I hastily grabbed at the other’s tentacles. Koo Hui-seo’s strands firmly wrapped around me and pulled me into his embrace.

The missing window wasn’t the only problem. Under the lip of the missing window sill, a hand shot up and grabbed where the frame should have been. Then, something round clambered up as well–a familiar head.

“Seo…..Mmph!”

Before I could inadvertently call out the Mage’s name, Koo Hui-seo covered my mouth with his hands. However, [Seo Dawon] seemed to have already noticed us. We falteringly walked backwards; [Seo Dawon] took a step forward for every step we retreated.

It was then.

“[Lay low].”

[Tsk…]

Koo Hui-seo, behind me, rapidly used a skill. Immediately, [Seo Dawon]'s expression changed. He blinked in confusion, and his gaze slid off of me. That thing was definitely staring straight at me a little while ago, but, as soon as Koo Hui-seo used his stealth skill, the [Mage] began to grope at the air like a blind person.

After gritting his teeth, Seo Dawon looked back into the room and pleaded, [Lee-kyung-ah, why are you running away?]

"……"

[Until when will you stay here?]

"……"

[You know I'm searching for you.]

His earnest voice made my feet automatically stop. I was even more confused this time–it truly felt like Seo Dawon.

Last time, the monster had only carefully crafted the Mage's face and left the rest haphazard, so my feelings weren't compromised, but this time, the image was perfect from the head to the tips of his toes. Even the subtle body movements were creepily similar.

My eyeballs rolled around, following his movements, bewildered. Koo Hui-seo clicked his tongue, noticing my wavering heart. "You can't let yourself be deceived, Lee-kyung-ssi…"

"……"

"Honestly… why are you so gullible…." [1] Koo Hui-seo murmured lamentingly. Furthermore, he still didn't take his hands off my mouth even though my back and his front were stuck together like glue; perhaps he was in disbelief at my attitude.

I punched Koo Hui-seo's thigh to convey that I understood, but all I felt were rigid tentacles and not flesh. My efforts were in vain, and I was left

with nothing but a tingling, aching hand.

Koo Hui-seo jumped lightly to the ceiling without making any noise. Like a spider, we tried to crawl out the door, crossing over the Mage’s head.

It was then.

[…Close.]

The door closed right in front of my nose with a bang. Startled from nearly being caught in the threshold, we curled up on the ceiling. It was obvious that [Seo Dawon] had locked the door with his skill.

[Demonhound].

The [Mage] didn’t stop there–he stamped the ground twice with great force. Immediately, black shadows formed at his feet; its slender body and canine snout resembled a greyhound.

The five shadow dogs that formed began to sniff and explore the floor; Koo Hui-seo stealthily recollected his longest tentacles, which were dangling over the ground in the dog’s path.

By a hair’s breadth, he was able to pick up the tentacle before the dog passed by; we breathed a sigh of relief. Eventually, the dogs, tails drooping, crawled back to [Seo Dawon]’s feet. The [Mage] looked down at the whining shadow dogs and smiled crookedly.

[So, they’ve already escaped… I thought things were going too well, since I’ve already finished off Ragi.]

After hearing his murmurs, I dispelled all lingering doubts as to the thing’s identity. The real Seo Dawon wouldn’t casually mention attacking Woo Ragi.

At the same time, though, goosebumps rose all over my skin.

If I had encountered him without Koo Hui-seo, I probably would have run to him, delighted to see him. It wasn’t just his face and voice, but also

his actions and gestures while using skills were the same as the Seo Dawon in my memories. The only difference, perhaps, was that the real Mage appeared more relaxed.

Perhaps because we had slipped through his fingers, the fake Dawon's electrifying bloodthirst roiled underneath his skin. I thought the Mage looked like he was awash with blood as he stood by the window, drenched in the glow of the setting sun. Perhaps Koo Hui-seo felt that intimidating pressure as well–he couldn't easily attempt to slip out of the room.

Just then.

[Wooo~ Woooo~]

Suddenly, the monster holding the key in its mouth appeared before the vanished window. As of now, that monster's key was the only way to escape this nightmare, so we kept a nervous eye on the monster.

Its face–large enough to fill the space left behind by the window–observed the room's contents. Suddenly, Seo Dawon reached out to the monster.

Crack–

The monster's head burst like a watermelon; its entire body became rigid at the unexpected situation. [Seo Dawon] obtained the key after flicking the monster away with one finger and turned his back on the dead creature.

Soon afterwards, we could hear the thump of the fallen gigantic monster; however, Seo Dawon's low tone felt even more audible.

[Well… It's not a bad idea to have them come to me.]

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Quick chapter upload before I leave for a date! Still Trying to decide if I have time to do a bonus chapter either this week or next. Might make it Next week…since the projected final chapter for this week ends on a bit of a doozy.

Footnotes

1. The word means “easy,” and can mean many things: from easy to deceive and also easily taken in by romance/lust. It’s kinda like… calling Lee-kyung gullible but also especially gullible with men, lmao.

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The key dangling from the ring around [Seo Dawon]'s wrist shook before my eyes.

With my mouth still blocked, I pointed out [Seo Dawon] to Koo Hui-seo–I wanted to know if his tentacles could sneak the key away while we were still left undetected.

However, Koo Hui-seo shook his head immediately. "The moment I touch the key, our stealth will break… With that sort of personality, there's no way he wouldn't have manufactured some sort of trap…"

Well, now that I think about it, 'Seo Dawon'… No, Fake Dawon was at the precipice of his anger right now. He was sure to have done something to his surroundings or the key.

However, waiting things out would be futile as well. I gently bit Koo Hui-seo's fingers, which were still blocking my mouth. I intended to convey that I wanted to speak, but, unpleasantly, the ex-chimera caressed my tongue with his fingers. It was only when I bit down until he almost bled that he removed his hand.

"I thought you were joking around…" the ex-chimera stated sadly.

"Why would I joke around with *you* like that?" I huffed and punched Koo Hui-seo on the side, but the guy only whined that he was hurt–not that it physically showed. He didn't budge one inch.

Anyway, I stopped punishing him because we were able to talk in whispers due to his skill. I asked, “How many minutes are left in your [Lay Low] skill?”

“Around 20 minutes.”

“What about the cooldown time?”

“About 10 minutes…”

That meant we needed to run away in 20 minutes, but all the windows and exit points for this room were closed. The room remained completely locked due to Fake Dawon’s mysterious skill, and the monster himself did not leave and remained in the room as well. It seemed like he still hadn’t rightfully rid himself of the suspicion that we were unable to leave the room yet.

“Then, how should we leave? Or should you launch a surprise attack from behind him?”

“I can’t fight unsophisticatedly, like a Mage…” [1]

With a frustrated heart, I pressed at Koo Hui-seo, but he simply stared meaningfully off into the distance while saying, “I can’t beat Seo Dawon.”

When I followed Koo Hui-seo’s gaze, I saw an old chimney. I looked back at the ex-chimera and asked, “So, we’re running away through that thing?”

“Yes.”

“But that doesn’t change the fact that Seo Dawon has the key in his hands.”

“……”

“If we don’t snatch away the key here…we’ll be in the same situation in a few hours anyway.”

Koo Hui-seo frowned, as if he couldn't refute my points. However, contrary to my expression, he cut through the silence and began talking about something else. "Lee-kyung-ssi. If Lee-kyung-ssi's body dies here, your body back in reality won't be safe either."

"What?"

"I've said that when you're hurt in the nightmare, your body will be injured as well…I've experienced it so many times." Koo Hui-seo seemed to always be concerned about my physical condition. Wrapping the tips of his softened tentacles around my broken leg, he created an enveloping cast; his brows furrowed as he surveyed my injury. Then, very carefully, he pressed his lips against the upper portion of my injury. Flinching at the soft touch against my calf, I tried to pull out my leg. However, the ex-chimera removed his lips quickly.

Because of this, I felt like I missed the timing to be angry at this pervert. Koo Hui-seo smiled at my stammering self and spoke in a soothing tone, "Let's first leave through the chimney…and then I'll place you in a safe location–even if you were to be left alone."

"……"

"After that, I think it'd be best if I tried to retrieve the key from Seo Dawon alone."

I tried to say something at those words, but Koo Hui-seo moved faster than I could speak. He pulled at the tentacles around my waist and quickly leaped towards the ceiling.

This all happened before I could respond. Koo Hui-seo pressed a thin, soft tentacle to my glabella to smooth out the wrinkles there. "Please don't be upset. To me… Lee-kyung-ssi is…"

"……"

"I'm worried you'll get more injured…" Though he spoke slowly, he stuffed his thickest tentacles up the chimney quickly. I heard crumbling

rock roll down the chimney; whenever that happened, I looked back at [Seo Dawon], frozen with horror. Although, I didn't think we were noticed.

Afterwards–with his tentacles firmly affixed to the structure–Koo Hui-seo strained his tentacles and began slowly pushing us up into the dark chimney. The tentacles holding my legs went up first, though, and we entered upside-down.

The problem, though, was when my waist was halfway up the chimney, [Seo Dawon] looked my way. Creepily, his red eyes seemed to met mine exactly. I knew that this was just in my head–the [Lay Low] skill was still maintained–but… I didn't feel so good.

[Tsk, Lee-kyung-ah…]

Unfortunately, my hunch was correct.

[Seo Dawon] smiled and reached out to me; simultaneously, the shadow underneath his hand fluctuated ominously. The shadow soon rose up from the floor; a large canine head popped out. If Koo Hui-seo hadn't blocked it, the attack would have ripped off my head.

[Woof–!]

"No!"

The [demonhounds] bit and ripped some tentacles off of Koo Hui-seo's shoulders; the ex-chimera didn't even groan in pain. I wanted to say something, but my head was already ascending the chimney, so I couldn't see what had happened afterwards. However, the fact that the tentacles wrapped around my legs kept reeling felt ominous.

It was then.

"Nnnngh!" Suddenly, all the tentacles that were holding my leg released their tension simultaneously, and I crashed down. It was clear that if I fell head first I would break my neck, and I had no time to cover my head.

But, as soon as I tightly shut my eyes, I fell into someone’s arms and not the hard floor. The fragrance of blood wafting from those arms was appalling.

[So, we finally meet.]

I could tell who it was without opening my eyes. [Seo Dawon] rubbed my cheek with a fingertip, slippery with some strange liquid. I desperately hoped it wouldn’t be Koo Hui-seo’s blood, but, within a few seconds, I heard something bluntly fall to the ground.

I opened my eyes at that sound. Rather, I tried to open my eyes, but [Seo Dawon] was peppering brief kisses over my eyes.

[What’s with your expression?]

He looked down onto my face frozen with fear and laughed. As if this was all some amusing prank. However, the laugh was cut short–a cold sneer grew on his face.

[Did I interrupt something nice?]

* * *

First, [Seo Dawon] tied both my hands. He attached a bracelet shaped like a snake biting its own tail onto each of my wrists; when he brought my wrists together, the snakes opened their mouths and bit the other’s tail. The bracelets had transformed into handcuffs.

[How did you break that?]

While disabling all movement in my arms, he moved to take something out of his inventory…however, he saw my limp leg. He paused his efforts to retrieve whatever he wanted and asked me about my injury.

I couldn’t answer the [Mage], nothing came to mind. “……”

[Does it hurt a lot?]

Though the tone of his voice was affectionate, when I didn’t answer, he didn’t hesitate to hold the broken leg in his hand. Then, he applied strength, as if he were about to crush it.

“Ah! Nngh…! Aaagh! It hurts! Hur–Aahh!” I couldn’t endure the pain and screamed, tilting my head backwards and shaking. Only then did he release my ankle. He even gently wiped the tears that formed at the corners of my eyes. Afterwards, he gave me a light embrace.

[Are you hurt anywhere else?]

“Th-There isn’t…” Unable to win against the threat of pain laden in [Seo Dawon]’s crooked eye smile, I answered quickly. Then, he hugged me tightly within his arms and strode out of the room. I closed my eyes, unable to look anymore at Koo Hui-seo’s collapsed body.

This fake [Seo Dawon] seemed to be familiar with the mansion’s infrastructure. After passing through a labyrinthian hallway and numerous rooms, he stood in front of a heavy gate engraved with thorny branches.

As if the doors had been waiting for him, they opened. The inside looked pitch black, so I couldn’t see what was there, but I could feel a bone-piercing chill from the threshold.

Trembling, I couldn’t endure the cold and burrowed my face into [Seo Dawon]’s nape. He stopped moving for a brief moment and took a deep breath. However, we soon started moving again, and, finally, we entered through the door.

After a long time, we entered a space filled with bright light. A different corridor–similar yet different to the ones in the mansion earlier–had manifested. We entered the nearest room which contained a gargantuan bed.

[Seo Dawon] gently laid me down on that bed and reached for my broken leg. When I shrank reflexively away–still frightened by the earlier events–he grasped my knee. When I grit my teeth and stayed still from the strength the [Mage] silently exerted, he finally loosened his grip.

I thought he would begin to torture me again. However, contrary to my expectations, he stroked my broken ankle and soon removed his hands.

[Seo Dawon] left me on the bed and began to slowly peruse the room. It was as if he was browsing through the decorations here.

Of course, I couldn't afford to let my guard down. I felt like I was trapped in a cage with a lion. I was sensitive to every one of his movements because I didn't know when he would suddenly turn on me and kill me.

On the other hand, [Seo Dawon] seemed relaxed as he leisurely looked at the ornaments that surrounded the bed. His attention was drawn to the old frame on the bedside table. After looking at it for a long while, he took the picture out of the frame and approached me. Then, he showed me the picture and asked,

[How old were you?]

Surprisingly, I was the subject depicted in the picture–me at 12 years old riding a bicycle.

Become a Patron!

TL: RIP Koo Hui-seo, RIP Woo Ragi.

This [Seo Dawon] is mega creepy.

Footnotes

1. Shade

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Chapter 254

Chapter 254

“I think I was… around 12 then…” As I answered, I wondered if a photo like that had ever existed. Then, the brown leather handles of the bicycle jumpstarted my memory.

‘I think that was the first time I had ever ridden a two-wheeled bicycle…’

After falling down a few times, I finally managed to balance and excitedly rode around an open space, though I was still quite wobbly, for about one hour. I was elated to be able to ride the bike without the training wheels.

Shaking myself from that memory, I looked back at [Seo Dawon]. Black smoke was rising from the edges of the picture he was holding.

“Fire…!” Startled, I shouted out automatically. However, the person holding the burning picture stayed calm. It was only then I realized that the [Mage] caused the fire. I bit my lips; [Seo Dawon] smiled down at me.

[How cute.]

After spouting something that sounded pretty ungenuine, he began to rummage through the furniture in the room.

However, something felt off. For some reason, all the old items that the [Mage] picked up looked familiar.

‘That game console…it looks similar to the one I had bought after saving my allowance for an entire month…’

[Seo Dawon] threw it mercilessly onto the ground and stomped on it.

I felt strangely sorrowful as the plastic shell broke and rolled around on the floor. Furthermore, as [Seo Dawon] stomped on the console a few more times, black smoke began puffing up from the scattered pieces. Like the burned picture, the console soon vanished, leaving no traces behind.

This template continued–Seo Dawon acted as if he were determined to destroy everything in this room. I closed my eyes while listening to the cacophany of my treasured items being smashed.

[Ah, finally…]

With [Seo Dawon]’s low exclamation, all sounds disappeared. I opened my eyes cautiously and saw the [Mage] standing in the middle of the desecrated room.

[Seo Dawon] gingerly pulled out a black box from a broken cabinet. The surface of the box was shiny, like metal, and my name was engraved onto the lid. It looked like a safe.

[What’s the password, Lee-kyung-ah?]

“……”

[Seo Dawon] approached me, holding the safe.

On the back, there was a complex dial engraved with a mixture of numbers and English letters. The issue, though, was that I had never seen this box before. I couldn’t possibly guess at its password. “I-I don’t know….”

[Really?]

Pierced with fear, I nodded my head; [Seo Dawon] gripped my neck with one hand.

“Cough, cough…”

[Think carefully. We’re almost there.]

He placed more force in his hands and thrust me onto the bed. I struggled–unable to breathe–but he simply overpowered me. When I felt that I would truly be strangled to death and scratched at his hands, [the Mage] loosened his hold slightly. Just enough to let me breathe.

“Hnghh, Haah…” I gasped.

He repeated that process three times; I lost all my fighting spirit and lay there with closed eyes. Finally, [Seo Dawon] placed his face close to mine.

[There must be something you don’t want to show to anyone?]

Of course, his words should have been meaningless to me, but I finally perceived the identity of that black box.

“Hnngh, Hrrk…” Crying, I turned the dial.

I wanted to live. I wanted to escape this nightmare wearing Seo Dawon’s face.

However, no matter how much I turned the dials, the box showed no signs of opening. My nails broke, caught between the grooves of the spinning numbers, but I couldn’t stop my crazed attempts at opening this thing.

[Click–Click–]

Then–I had no idea what the correct passcode was–I suddenly felt the click of gears interlocking. The lid of the box rattled and moved, as if it were about to clatter over.

As soon as the box showed signs of opening, [Seo Dawon] snatched it away from my hands. The box finished opening at that moment.

[Ah.]

Seo Dawon looked inside and gave a brief exclamation. His expression soon turned quite mysterious. I couldn’t see what was in the box from my position; I simply sat back, breathing deeply.

However, this all felt somewhat ominous.

A bleak chill began to flow out of the box; [Seo Dawon] couldn’t tear his gaze away from its interior. His expression looked distorted–as if he were trying to suppress laughter; either way, he looked ecstatic.

[Is that how you think of me?]

“……”

As I listened to his excited voice, I cautiously moved my arms. The [Mage] still had his eyes trained on the box. Only one thought entered my head when I saw that awful doppelganger.

‘….I have to run away.’

He’ll definitely break my neck next time. I moved cautiously to the edge of the bed without taking my eyes off of him. The tips of my ragged fingernails tingled as they brushed against the blanket.

However, it was already too late. As I was about to fall off the edge of the bed, I was dragged by my wrist towards the [Mage]. The handcuffs he had clasped onto my arms wriggled and dragged me forward with great force. It was futile to struggle.

Tap–

While twisting and turning on the ground, I heard the box’s lid close and plodding footsteps. I vividly felt [Seo Dawon]’s shadow fall over me.

The [Mage] stood by my fallen body for a while before lifting me up. When our eyes met, I couldn’t help but close mine in fear. I could only desperately wish that he wouldn’t torture me if he was going to kill me…

[Lee-kyung-ah.]

That thing called out to me using the voice of someone I liked; when I didn’t open my eyes, he bit my lips. I could feel the simultaneously cold and lukewarm tip of his tongue licking the blood off my lips.

I opened my eyes at that disgusting touch; [Seo Dawon] smiled and asked,

[When you wake up, you’ll forget almost everything, but…]

“…….”

[It’s okay as long as you remember one thing.]

With that said, [Seo Dawon] pushed a dagger between my ribs.

“Ah! Nngh…!” The horrifying pain made my breath catch; soon, blood began to seep out.

It didn’t feel real, even now, so I just stared blankly at his hand. Then, I belatedly grabbed his wrist, but it was far too late. Violent nausea flooded in as my blood spurted outside.

However, that’s when it started.

“Hnnngh…”

[That I’m the one who killed you.]

“Ah, hnnngh…”

[Understand? ‘Seo Dawon’ killed you…]

[Seo Dawon] whispered his name continuously in my ear as I lay there, dying.

I pushed him away and blocked the stab wound with my hand, but the blood kept seeping through the gaps. It was getting harder and harder to breathe. Eventually, I slipped in the pool of my own blood and collapsed to the ground. Only then did I feel Seo Dawon pull the dagger out of my side.

The resulting pain was acute, as if I had been cut by paper; soon, the pain swallowed my entire body as if a wildfire was spreading through my nerves. I began to convulse from that pain; [Seo Dawon] stared at me as he gently brushed aside my sweat-drenched bangs.

[I hope this pain lasts for a long while.]

"……"

[Ah, I want to see your face when you reunite with him…]

He laughed quietly, said something incomprehensible, and moved slowly away from my side.

After walking a few steps away, he set fire to the box he was holding and threw it onto the bed. The fire that spread from the box consumed the area around it; the room was soon engulfed by the flames. [Seo Dawon] watched me quietly from outside the perimeter of the fire before vanishing.

Left alone, I slowly lost consciousness. The more I blinked, the darker my vision became. And soon, I couldn't see anything anymore. However, the pain lasted for a long while. The agonizing sensation only stopped when the fire lapped at my skin, making it feel like my bones were melting.

[You've failed the surprise event, 'Maze of Eternal Dreams.' Your EXP gain has been slightly reduced.]

[You were mercilessly attacked by the 'Nightmare!' What a rare scenario–What a shame.]

[Warning! 'Choi Lee-kyung's' 'Ego Erosion' has increased by 15%. Contamination status level: 'Dangerous']

[Every time you dream, the chance of being attacked by the 'Nightmare' increases slightly.]

[If you fail to gain more ‘control’ over the contracted servants, your ‘Erosion’ will accelerate. Please pay more attention to your intimacy and domination levels with your servants!]

[Time left until ego collapse: …….]

[Penalty time has started. Please check the countdown time until penalty completion from: setting > List of failed quests > Remaining penalty time!]

Just when I almost completely lost all eyesight, system messages– countlessly layered atop each other–came into view. However, the letters soon broke and transformed into illegible characters.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: What a revelation of so many things. Ego Erosion? Contamination? Also why is the system (???) so pointedly trying to drive a wedge between SDW and Lee-kyung? If that nightmare will show up again, will Lee-kyung have a re-match?

This chapter is a bit of a doozy, but I’m so excited for you guys to see what’s coming next.

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Chapter 255

Chapter 255

haa…hoo… [1]

My consciousness recognized my breathing sounds first. Something was stuffed into my nose, and I couldn't raise my hand to remove it. It seemed like something heavy was laying on my hand.

'My eyes hurt…'

As if I were suffering from dry-eyes, my eyelids felt desiccated and stuck together.

Honestly, my eyes would feel less stiff if they had been glued together. Just as I thought that, I remembered what had happened before I lost consciousness and tried to pry my eyes open. Suddenly, my body ached all over, and the exhaustion made everything difficult… But, I wanted to confirm something.

'…Am I alive?'

Beep– Beep–

At that moment, I heard the sound of an ECG.

I blinked again. The light stung as if it were an arrow piercing my eye, but, through my bleary vision, I could tell I was in a hospital. Besides, I could smell the unique sanitized scent of the hospital as well.

"Lee-kyung-ah." Someone had seen me blink and approached. He clasped my finger and placed a hand on my head.

It was Seo Dawon.

I shivered at the familiar voice.

“Are you cold?” He said something, but I couldn’t really understand. However, from the moment I heard the Mage’s voice, it felt like the energy had been sapped out of my body; even more strength–from my already lacking and exhausted stores–was seeping out. I didn’t sleep, but I could only lie still with my eyes closed. The Mage didn’t try to engage me in a conversation again.

Soon afterwards, medical staff approached my bed. They checked my condition and wrote things in their charts. It wasn’t until a bunch more people entered the room that I was able to open my eyes properly; I could only nod or shake my head at the staff’s questions.

I could feel Seo Dawon staring at me, but he didn’t try to talk even after the medical staff left. He was motionless, holding my hand with his cold fingers. That much was fine. However, when he briefly let my hand go, the Mage released a heavy sigh. “…Get some sleep.”

“…….” I nodded; Seo Dawon placed his hand over my eyes.

Afterwards, he probably activated a skill. I gently fell asleep as if I were slowly sinking into deep waters.

I could hear the Mage’s low voice from a far distance, but I couldn’t understand what he was saying.

* * *

“Then, you can’t remember anything?”

“Y-Yeah…”

Jung Garam cut the apple into lumps without much grace or sincerity; Kim Olim kicked the leg of his chair. The assassin grumbled as he re-peeled the apple. Then, he cut the fruit into cube-like bite-sized pieces and placed them on my tray.

[Clack Clack!]

Lackey repeatedly opened and closed its jaws as if it were about to bite the Assassin. I dragged the skeleton into my embrace and began feeding it the small pieces of apples with a toothpick.

Jung Garam watched me chew a few pieces before stealthily slipping his dagger back into his inventory. He questioned again, “Nothing?”

“Just… I vaguely remember being chased around a lot… I just don’t remember the details.”

“Don’t you remember meeting Ragi-hyung?”

“No…”

“It seems like he suffered a big shock as he escaped the nightmare. It’s plausible that his memory is temporarily confused,” Kim Olim said.

[Clack Clack.]

Kim Olim, as she poured me some lukewarm water, defended me; Jung Garam frowned, as if he were frustrated.

I felt just as frustrated as the assassin, though.

I remember that Koo Hui-seo had suddenly visited my home in a strange state, and I was swept into some space alongside the ex-chimera. However, the events afterwards were all blank–nothing came to mind.

I struggled for a long time, trying to fill an empty paper with details, even though I was told that it was alright for my memory to be so fragmented. Eventually, I quit without any substantial results. Whenever I tried to remember the events, I kept having an awful headache that only a coma-like sleep could chase away.

“Then, what about your Dawon-hyung-phobia?”

“…….”

“Honestly, Dawon hyung had his hands full trying to wake up Koo Hui-seo; he had no time to even touch you. But, why…”

A really huge problem remained, though.

As Jung Garam had pointed out, after the nightmare, I felt like I was about to go insane whenever ‘Seo Dawon’ was near–especially if we were left alone. My heart began thumping fast; cold sweat flowed down my back. I was so afraid that I almost vomited what I had recently eaten on the Mage.

At first, neither Seo Dawon nor I knew the cause, so the Mage repeatedly placed sleeping spells on me. When the other servants intervened, I finally found that my reactions were caused by the Mage.

This phobia had gotten worse over time.

I was able to bear meeting Seo Dawon for the first three days after I had woken; afterwards, the [Mage] tried hard not to appear before me again. I heard that he would only occasionally come by my side after I had fallen asleep. “…I really don’t know…”

“Did Dawon-hyung dump you in the nightmare or something?”

[Clack Clack Clack?]

“Piss off…”

Though Jung Garam may have been trying to lighten my mood, I couldn’t find it within me to joke about this situation. I’d been feeling miserable ever since I woke up.

I wanted to see Seo Dawon. However, whenever I saw him I wanted to run away, and when I couldn’t run, cold sweat ran down my back… I couldn’t understand my contradictory reactions.

Choi Kyung-sik, who couldn’t stand watching this anymore, had barricaded himself in the lab to create a potion that might have some effect on this trauma. Since then, we’d lost contact with him.

The Alchemist had said that I had been unfortunately dragged into Koo Hui-seo's infectious nightmare–a variation on a curse. It was a very nasty curse where those dragged in experienced Koo Hui-seo's nightmares; if their dream body obtained injuries beyond a certain level, the real body would be affected as well.

Even Koo Hui-seo had still yet to awake; fortunately, it seemed like his brain waves were improving, and he was expected to regain consciousness within a few days. The servants were determined to give Koo Hui-seo brand new nightmares when he opened his eyes.

However, I was more curious than angry. What on earth had happened in his dreams?

And…

[Remember.]

'Who said that?'

Whenever I tried to recall what had happened in the nightmare, an unfamiliar voice surfaced in my mind. His arrogant tone; his distinctive vibe…

To be honest, I thought I'd be able to recognize that man if I were to see him again. He was taller than me, and his eyes… were they black? However, that person wasn't like Koo Hui-seo or Woo Ragi. Rather than those guys…

'He slightly resembles Seo Dawon…'

Of course, Seo Dawon wouldn't have a reason to harm me, but… I felt somehow stifled and uncomfortable. Of course, the Mage would never harm me. Besides, these days Seo Dawon was…

"Choi Lee-kyung. What is this?" Kim Olim asked.

"Ah, that's… S-Something that Seo Dawon left behind…"

“What is it?”

…these days the Mage was so incredibly kind.

The small stone on top of the bedside table that Kim Olim had lifted in her hands was one of the things that the Mage had left for me every night. Because my condition rapidly deteriorated whenever I saw his face, he would only come to see me when I was asleep.

I felt sorry and briefly wrote down a summary of my recovery and physical condition on a memo pad, mainly focusing on the things that Seo Dawon would want to know about. Then, when I woke up in the morning, the piece of paper vanished, and a pretty pebble appeared in its place. Since I was waiting for his reply, I felt delighted from the bottom of my heart.

The number of stones grew during the length of my hospitalization. I piled them up on the side–it wasn’t too difficult to stack since they were shaped a bit like building blocks.

“They’re purified mana stones… Aren’t these consumable?”

“R-Really?”

“It’s to slightly increase your ability levels. Haven’t you tried one?”

“Oh……?” When I heard Kim Olim’s words, I remembered something. Come to think of it, when Seo Dawon first came home, he had given me a similar consumable…

I had thought it was just some decoration since it didn’t melt even if I were to handle and touch it; plus, the Mage didn’t leave any signs that I should eat them even when I let them pile up. Feeling slightly embarrassed, I popped one into my mouth and rolled it around. “…It doesn’t taste good? Rather… it doesn’t have a taste at all?”

“I don’t think you’re in any position to complain about food.”

“It’s not a complaint…”

“It can’t be helped. Next time, I’ll bring some honey for dipping.”

I tried to decline, but a [System Message] materialized before I could open my mouth.

[Stamina has increased by +1]

So, it really was a mana stone. My exhausted and fatigued body actually felt a ripple of vigour rush through it. However, Kim Olim immediately dissuaded me from eating any more, “Try not to eat so many in the evening. You won’t be able to sleep well.”

“Ahh… Okay.”

“Then, we’ll go to the dorms for now. We’ll contact you as soon as we hear from Choi Kyung-sik.”

“Alright.”

“Choi Lee-kyung, see ya tomorrow. Hey, Skeleton! Keep him safe!”

[Clack!]

The servants were busy trying to find out Ryu Hyerin and Bae Jaemin’s movements while travelling to and fro from our home base to the hospital. The emptied hospital room quickly became quite lonely, but I soon laid back and turned on the TV.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: Soon! Payoff!

Also, omg, Kim Olim is so motherly here. T_T I want her to pat my head and give me fruit.

Footnotes

1. This is…supposed to be onomatopoeia for breathing…

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Chapter 256

Chapter 256

‘It’s already 10…’

Time passed by as I flipped through the channels mindlessly.

There was nothing interesting on, but I did feel very uncomfortable when I saw that Bae Jaemin had been voted as the [No. 1 popular man among women in their 20s] on some entertainment channel.

“That has to be scripted…” I glared at the Priest’s bright smile on the TV screen before turning off the TV with the remote control. My annoyance was rising because Bae Jaemin or Ryu Hyerin kept on showing up no matter what channel I turned to.

To be honest, time crept by at a snail’s pace when you were lying atop a hospital bed. Although my condition was better than before, I couldn’t really walk around independently. So, I busied myself by watching TV–though there weren’t many programs on the hospital’s networks that fit my taste–or browsing the internet on my cell phone.

There were too many channels that discussed famous Users; my insides roiled at how Bae Jaemin and Ryu Hyerin were depicted coolly. For example, on the gossip channels, people talked about the Priest’s income, his sports car, his achievements… After so many hours of this, I couldn’t help but cringe.

The people on the panel were frivolously sucking up to the Priest, so… I turned the TV off as soon as I heard the conversation going in that direction and began browsing the internet.

Unlike the TV, I could search for things that suited my interest or tastes on the Internet. After a few searches, I found a community that did, indeed, suit my tastes…

It wasn't a particularly popular community, but this site…

[Welcome to the 'Red Lotus Fanpage'!]

…was a Red Lotus fan cafe. [1]

The site theme was a bit old-fashioned, but the number of daily visitors was still within the 3 to 4 thousand range.

Above all, unlike other forum sites, this site looked favorably upon Seo Dawon and the other guild members. I tried not to search for articles related to the Mage on most famous forum communities because of the overwhelming amount of malicious comments that broke my heart to read.

However, this place was different. The homepage showcased Seo Dawon's face in his heydays as a User; there were many affectionately-edited uploaded videos. Also, there were more high-quality data about Red Lotus in this fan cafe than on other sites.

And, the best thing was…

[Title: Guildmaster, when was this photo taken??]
Posted by: Dawon-ieee

Content:

(Photo)

I have all the MOUs until October, but I can't figure this one out TT_TT What's with the fucking adorable deer horns????? I thought this was part of a Halloween pack, so I searched for it until my eyes hurt. But I can't see it anywhere TT_TT

[See Comments]

Red Lotus I love you: This is the MOU xxYear Christmas Special Fan Block, Red Version.

└**Original Poster:** Damn, Is there merch as well?

Red Lotus I Love You: yeye 1 poster, 1 signed photo copy

└**Original Poster:** No wonder… I didn't even see scalpers selling this at a premium TT_TT [2]

Red Lotus I Love You: After this sold out, that [Tower of Fuck] [3] happened… -_- There were no sales for at least a week afterwards.

└**Original Poster:** fuck…

…there were many rare pictures of Seo Dawon.

The post I was looking at seemed like a picture of a User's photobook; the photo was probably taken using their cellphone camera; Seo Dawon was smiling while wearing some soft, deer horns. Though I knew that popular Users would often be in photo shoots like other celebrities…

"What the–this is too cute…."

…I didn't realize that he would participate in photoshoots with such an adorable vibe.

Even Woo Ragi was there, just slightly out of frame with half his body out of the shot; the swordsman was wearing a Santa hat with gold bells attached. Honestly, it was so funny.

'How much did they get paid to wear these clothes and do a photo shoot?'

I read through the praise-worthy post with an intrigued look on my face. Lackey also looked at the screen and then tilted its head when it saw the Mage.

"You're surprised too, huh?"

[Clack Clack?]

Lackey must have also been confused by the Mage's appearance, it kept tilting its skull. Giggling, I checked for new posts under the Seo Dawon tab before moving onto the [Free Chat] forum.

Ah, that was right; in this fan cafe, there was a separate forum where people could chat about various topics, [Free Chat]. Perhaps that was why this forum category had more posts than any other tab.

I liked this site for more than just the Seo Dawon materials. I had actually joined this fan cafe after seeing the atmosphere in the [Free Chat] forum.

Because…

[Title: Summary of 'Today's User's' 313th 'Who You?' interview.]

Content:

Question: You used to be a guild member, but now you're in the leader position. What did you find different or difficult about this change?

Bae: Actually, when I was in the guild, I worked alone more than at the instruction of my team. Therefore, in the beginning, there were times when I felt overwhelmed–it was hard to catch up. I had struggled with feelings of solidarity rather than enjoying a team-play atmosphere. However, that experience seems to have helped me run [HaHae] now. (Laughs)

Question: What kind of guild will you make [HaHae] into in the future?

Bae: More than anything, I want to create a guild that values the safety of its guild members. I don't want the [HaHae] guild members to experience all the hardships I had experienced. Above all, I believe what's most important is the guildmaster's sense of responsibility.

Question: Is there anything difficult about leading your guild members? How do you resolve conflicts?

Bae: I don't talk much and I tend to listen more. I'm also trying, as much as possible, to create a horizontal hierarchical guild culture–one that feels as

unoppressive as possible. We have an anonymous system called [Blind]; you can file a complaint or suggestion without ever revealing your identity.

(Omission)

I believe I was able to create this system because, when I first became a User, I struggled with adjusting to guild life and was ignorant of many things.

.
.

lolololololol

Hey, you guys seeing this?

‘I think I can lead [HaHae] well because I was a burdensome dick during the Red Lotus era?’ He’s using the Red Lotus name whenever it befits him, that fucker, and when the time comes to return the favor he just fucks them over lolol. [4]

…This site was a gathering place for many Bae Jaemin haters.

The mood among the 30 comments on this post was similar to the original poster. I also saw some outright malicious abuse towards the Priest.

[Expand Comments]

>lolol I’ve always said they needed to reinvestigate the [Tower of Fuck] lolololololol

┗ R e a l lolol, his grudge is so insane

┗ Honestly, so suspicious. Damn.

┗ If you look at what he’s doing nowadays, he’s probably done more than stab people in the back…

> It’s honestly such a talent to look like such a loser while giving an interview lolol

┗ If it were me, I would have shut my mouth even if I was such a loser

and the others ostracized me like that. Lolol, is he proud of that or something

└ What ostracization… lolol he was always clinging to Seo Dawon. It was just a while ago that he was benefitting from the ‘Business Gay Performance’ [5]

└ If Seo Dawon was asked that kind of question he’d just laugh it off like a chad [6] Tsk Tsk. The standard is just too different. [7]

└ R e a l

└ If it were Seo Dawon, he would have said, ‘It’s hard, but I smile while looking at my bank account~’

└ Lolololololololol

> If he had such a hard time, then he should have left ~ TT_TT

> He sure kept his mouth shut when he made 10 times the amount in annual salary compared to other guilds. BS lololol

> Honestly, no matter how much of an embarrassment he is, is that something a decent person would say about the deceased? He’s basically begging to be criticized for giving an interview like that.

└ The dead are silent TT_TT TT_TT

└ Our Jaemin-ie is unloyal TT_TT

> I honestly can’t believe it. TT_TT That kind of crazy loser is alive and Seo Dawon is dead…

I clicked to expand on every comment and rolled around from side to side. [8]

It wasn’t just this article–reading all the other posts on the [Free Chat] forum, I could understand why the Red Lotus fans hated Bae Jaemin.

In the beginning, the members didn’t exactly reject the Priest. When all of Red Lotus members were still alive, Bae Jaemin was one of the most popular members; so, at first, there were many Red Lotus fans who were glad that at least the Priest came back alive.

However, after Bae Jaemin had returned to full capacity and mentioned Red Lotus, he had implied that the tragedy had occurred due to the rash and irresponsible behavior of the other guild members. Including Seo Dawon. Because of that, this fan cafe had been witness to several fights between the Priest's fans and the rest of the Red Lotus fans.

Eventually, Bae Jaemin's fans went their separate ways, and this site became a safe space of sorts. I was glad to have found this fan-cafe–this place was one of the few places where I couldn't see the Priest at the top of the search results whenever I searched up the Red Lotus.

Thanks to that, I comfortably spent a long while scraping through the boards for rare photos and videos. But, the more I looked at these things… why did I miss the Mage more in real life?

'I can't even bear to look at him even if we were to see each other…'

Strangely, my body seized whenever the Mage approached me…

The sheer joy at seeing insults shot at Bae Jaemin had faded, and I quickly became gloomy again. When will Choi Kyung-sik be finished with creating that potion? Especially when finally…

'…Seo Dawon became more honest.'

I'd gained a little confidence after the Han Kiseok fiasco; honestly, I really resent this handicap. If it weren't for Koo Hui-seo's business, I would have cornered the Mage, stopping him from escaping while saying all I kept inside my heart.

I checked my now-hot phone's remaining battery life. "It's already 1 am?"

I was honestly surprised at the time

Where did the hours go? For the last few nights, I would be unable to hold out past 11 pm and, exhausted, fall asleep while scrolling through the

fan page. It was strange that I hadn't fallen asleep when it was already 1 am.

Then, I suddenly remembered the mana stone I had swallowed during the day. "Ah, the stamina…"

Kim Olim was right. I raised up my torso and stared at the remaining mana stones placed atop the side table. "How many more do I have to eat to stay up all night?"

[Clack Clack……]

The haphazard thought of staying up and pretending to be asleep–waiting for Seo Dawon's nightly visit–crossed my mind. Maybe I'd be able to tamp down on my shivers if I weren't looking straight at the Mage…

"You should be asleep now."

"Agh!!!"

However, as if someone had read my mind, I could hear a low voice from the side.

I whipped my head around in surprise; since when had Seo Dawon been standing there awkwardly in the corner of the hospital room, staring at me? The Mage slowly walked forward.

Upsettingly, my hands and feet stiffened at the sight of the Mage. Seo Dawon smiled bitterly at my paling expression.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: "**It's honestly such a talent to look like such a loser while giving an interview"**

Honestly, what a great burn–antis are scary, ya'll. Also, question, I know I localize more (and place the literal meaning in footnotes). Do people like that method over placing the literal meaning in the text and the localized version in the footnotes? (For example, all the slang in the chat messages in this chapter)

Footnotes

1. fan cafes are sites dedicated to something, a person, a kpop group, a piece of media etc. It's like a forum used by fans and populated by a large number of content creators.
2. stands for premium. It's a shorthand for merchandise or tickets sold at 'premium' by scalpers
3. Instead of 'Tower of Command,' the commenter portmanteau'd Fuck or any other generic swear word into the name. Thus, 'Tower of Fuck' ( )
4. (meck-i-da) is gyeongsang province dialect for "to eat." In korean, eating can be slang for many things (actually eating, taking, dominating etc) To feed someone can mean different things depending on what you're feeding. In this case, Bae Jaemin is feeding the 'Red Lotus' guild nothing but bad things, aka insults.
5. = (Bi-gae-puh) is an acronym for 'Business Gay Performance) In the idol world, especially among male idols, it means that two members intentionally create an atmosphere like a gay couple for fan-service.
6. (literally level 10 alpha), It's internet slang for like the most chad of chads. They're calling Seo Dawon incredibly cool here.
7. In the original ( ) the literal translation would be "The bowl is different." In slang, 'Bowl' means ability or talent.
8. Imagine a fangirl rolling around on her bed, laughing and blushing at comments about her favorite idol

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Chapter 257

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“Are you still in a lot of pain?” The Mage asked.

“……”

Seo Dawon approached until he was about 3 steps away from the bed and did not get any closer. Then, he called out to me in a soft tone.

I rubbed at my stiffened back while furtively avoiding his gaze. I wanted to answer his question, but my mouth wouldn’t open–as if my throat had clammed up from being parched.

[Clack Clack!]

I wasn’t the only one affected by my anxiety; Lackey, taking cues from my expression, was on full alert. The skeleton had gotten off the bed and stood in front, with arms splayed out wide, even though I didn’t give it a command.

The skeleton looked a bit like an awkward child, but its posture was surprisingly effective… It felt psychologically comforting to have the skeleton’s small body blocking the space between the Mage and I.

However, Seo Dawon looked down at Lackey with an ambiguous expression. How should I put it… his expression seemed to convey that the mage was holding back his irritation. Of course, from his perspective, this overprotectiveness couldn’t feel too good, but…

“Haah.” Seo Dawon released a short sigh and retreated one step. I felt sorry for the Mage, but I didn’t say anything. After the distance between us increased, I was able to breathe more comfortably.

The mage rubbed his brows briefly before saying in a gentle voice, “With all your letters, I thought you may have gotten a bit better.”

“….I-I did get… a bit better,” I said vaguely–I couldn’t quite admit that my trauma had returned when I saw the Mage. Seo Dawon stood silently; it seemed like he had understood the unspoken words hidden in my statement.

I took a sidelong glance at the Mage; the corners of his mouth were tilted up, but I could see the bloodlust deep within his eyes. Perhaps… he found it hard to compartmentalize his feelings for the current situation or his frustration with Koo Hui-seo.

‘He looks totally irritated…’

What if some of his irritation was directed towards me? The Mage had done nothing but try his best to save me, but, as soon as I woke up, I had ostracized him for no reason.

Of course, I didn’t intend for this situation to happen, but perhaps he might still resent me. As soon as I thought that, I couldn’t stand for this misunderstanding to continue, so, with my head still deeply bowed, I reached my hand out to the Mage. Though the tips of my fingers trembled slightly, I found it easier to muster the courage to speak.

“You want me to grab your hand?” Seo Dawon asked.

“……Yeah.”

“You’re scared, but you still want me to hold your hand?”

“……”

Seo Dawon slowly approached, his voice still laden with disbelief. The speed at which he grabbed my hand, though, was faster than his approach.

As soon as my fingers were clasped in his, he gently pressed the tattoo pattern on my ring finger.

Lackey tried to bite the Mage but paused in the middle of its attempt to look back at me. When I managed–with great effort–to shake my head, the skeleton backed away; however, its eyes were still focused on the Mage.

Of course, Seo Dawon easily ignored the skeleton's bloodthirst. "… Breathe slowly."

"…Haaah." I wasn't purposely hyperventilating. However, ever since my hand touched his, my heart beat fast; I felt dizzy, as if I were about to faint. It felt like my head was spinning.

Even as he comforted me, Seo Dawon continued to get closer. Then, using his weight, he pushed me back onto the bed, still holding my hand in his.

However, when he leaned over me, I suddenly fell into an irrational panic; I thought that Seo Dawon would hold me down and stab me. This was an unwarranted delusion, but I had flashbacks–as if I had vividly experienced this implausible scenario.

So, when the Mage's hand brushed against my ribs as he attempted to cover me with a blanket, I screamed, "Haaaghhh!"

"……" Seo Dawon paused; he stared down at my crying self. Then, he bowed his head. He held down my fluttering chest with one hand; his lips kissed up a path from my cheek to my eyes where they gently licked away my tears.

I couldn't endure, and I bashed my hands against his chest. I just wanted to run away. If this continued, I felt like he would kill me.

However, the Mage wasn't pushed away nor did he attempt to soothe me with comforting words. He looked down at my sweat-drenched body and gently unfurled my shaking fist, one finger at a time.

He placed his hand over my now open one. After a brief contact, he pulled his hand away; a black dagger was now sandwiched between our palms.

I almost screamed the moment I saw the dagger, but the Mage was faster than my mouth. He closed my fingers around the handle of the dagger, making me grab it firmly in my hand; afterwards, he brought the blade against his neck.

To reiterate… He borrowed my hand to aim the dagger at his neck.

It didn't seem like he was joking–and the deep blue engravings on the edge of the blade looked threatening as well. Seo Dawon's behavior was so daring that even Lackey froze in its tracks.

When the blade touched his neck, my silent system materialized a notification window before my eyes.

[Sylph's Fall]

Type: Dagger
Grade: Rare
Durability: 200
Equipment Level Restriction: None (Requires special conditions)

Special Skill: Downfall (Once a month, this dagger can ignore all gaps in strength and inflict a fatal blow on a vengeful spirit.)

Description:

A fairy who lives within black waters; a short sword made from the ribs that protected a Sylph's core. This is a set item alongside 'Sylph's glory.' You must charge it with a certain amount of mana for the weapon to be used periodically.

***Available for users that have equipped ‘Sylph’s Glory’**
***This sword cannot make physical attacks**
***When equipped with ‘Sylph’s Glory,’ this sword may be summoned at any moment.**
***[Downfall cooldown time: 30 days]**

“W-What…” I stuttered

“In the end, I thought I would need to use this.”

“What is this?”

Seo Dawon, who had been whispering tranquilly, did not stop there; he carefully climbed atop the bed. Each action, every movement he made, caused my head to ache. I had not noticed he took his hand away from mine and kept the arm that held the dagger in the air, as if I were a kid in detention. [1]

However, my hands kept on shaking; I couldn’t fix my posture and my arm naturally fell down. At the sight of the dagger that now pointed at his chest, Seo Dawon bowed his head. I tried to keep the blade from piercing his skin, but there was no space to retreat.

Holding the dagger and sniffling back tears, I wept, “Why are you… doing this…!”

“Do you still trust me?”

I paused at those words; meanwhile, Seo Dawon smiled and kissed me on the lips. A stiff tongue–one that lacked the warmth of life–invaded and penetrated through my paling lips.

The Mage was so persistent; I almost wondered if he was trying to melt and consume me. Of course, I held the dagger in my hand like a lifeline, but I lacked the conviction to point its blade.

Seo Dawon licked away my fearful tears and kissed the lobes of my ears. Then, sliding his lips along my jawline, he whispered, “I won’t leave you alone if you don’t stab me.”

“……”

When I paused, Seo Dawon smiled and loosened one button on my patient’s scrubs. I repositioned the dagger in my grip several times, but I didn’t stop him even as all my buttons became undone.

Eventually, my torso, which even I had only seen a few times while being dressed by the nurses in the ward, was revealed. Seo Dawon was reckless as he unbuttoned my scrubs but paused after seeing my thin body: outlines of my bones exposed and wounds covered with a thick layer of gauze.

The Mage attempted to touch the wound but pulled his hand away before his fingertips could meet broken skin. He fell silent for a few, long minutes.

“…What must I do for you to stab me?” the Mage asked, expressionless.

I shook my head slowly.

“This could happen again in the future…”

“……”

“You’ve been suffering, and yet you still want me to hold your hand…” Seo Dawon smiled dryly, as if he were working hard to maintain his smile. I looked at him and tossed the dagger–which felt like it had been glued to my fingers–away from the bed.

With a metal twang, it struck and rolled across the marble floor; that sound felt like it had pierced through our relationship–a death knell. Seo Dawon stared at the spinning dagger on the ground before turning to look at me again.

“I won’t stab you. I… Whatever you give me, I won’t do it. Even if I die.”

“Yeah. That seems to be the case.” Seo Dawon nodded placidly. However, I wasn’t done–I grabbed his arm with all my might.

Become a Patron!

TL: Bad Dawon! Dying (again) won’t solve anything!

TT_TT I do feel bad for him, though. It does show how the Mage is at his wits end. But *soon*! I’m excited for the upcoming chapters!

Footnotes

1. In Korea, a common punishment was to make children stand outside the classrooms with their hands in the air.

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“…Don’t ever! Don’t ever do something like this again. Understood?” I clung onto the Mage.

However, Seo Dawon merely smiled coldly. “Lee-kyung-ah… That’s something you should say after you’ve sliced through my stomach.”

Though his tone was chilly, it seemed like his anger had lost momentum.

After his sarcastic remark, Seo Dawon seized my neck with one hand. Though he didn’t squeeze hard enough to choke me, I knew that he could easily break my neck with just a press of his thumb.

An uneasy atmosphere settled between us. However, the Mage couldn’t even properly threaten to break my neck–his fingers still trembled; I covered his hand with mine. Seo Dawon briefly glared at my hand before relaxing his grip; he then slowly lowered his hand down my exposed front.

“I thought about it.” He pressed on my most fatal injury, right under my prominent ribs. I flinched and inhaled reflexively; his hand did not stop pressuring that spot. Maintaining that position, Seo Dawon leaned in to whisper, “My desire to kill you stems from instinct, regardless of my desires or will.”

“……”

“Plus, you have no idea whether or not your affection towards me is real.”

Seo Dawon had long stated he was drawn to my blood. Of course, he had never explicitly shown his desire for my blood in my presence, but, anytime we broached this topic, Seo Dawon's expression looked so sensitive.

Since he never had this sort of impulse while alive, I thought this desire for blood may be a penalty crafted by the system.

And the Mage loathed that desire. He was someone that wanted–needed–control over his situation; thus, he became angry at the barbaric (*what sick system would make someone salivate over blood?*) system that attempted to manipulate his actions.

However, this time, he was also doubtful of my own feelings. He attributed my affection for him as an emotion manufactured by this 'contract.'

At first, I couldn't understand what he said, so I stared blankly at him; soon, anger slowly rose within–enough for me to forget my constant anxiety. It was like he was totally denying my feelings for him.

"…What nonsense is that?" I asked, as if I were picking a fight.

Seo Dawon, though, was unperturbed. Rather, he had a reply ready, as if he was waiting for my question. "Ragi saw. Someone with 'my face' killed you in that nightmare."

"…What?"

"However, you remembered none of that."

I was simply dumbfounded–Woo Ragi never said anything like that to me. 'How did Woo Ragi see inside my dreams?'

However, that wasn't important right now. Did I lose my memory through a trick from the system or through shock? "The doctor said that there is a high probability that my memories have failed due to excessive bleeding. When I recover–!"

“–But, I can roughly guess what had happened: who made you injured like this. You aren’t scared of other people, but you’re frightened from just seeing me.”

”……”

“You thought it was strange too, right?”

Of course, I thought my behavior was strange. However, I didn’t think much further–I simply thought that Koo Hui-seo may have done something and not the Mage. Even though someone wearing Seo Dawon’s face may have harmed me, it must have been the ex-chimera instead.

At that moment, as if he had read my thoughts, Seo Dawon snorted. “What a convenient memory.”

“……”

“What do you think will happen if I stab you right now? I think I know the answer.”

“……”

“I can see it on your face, you’re thinking, ‘Servants can’t kill Masters anyway, so he can’t truly intend to kill me.'”

“……”

With that said, Seo Dawon grabbed my wrist, the arm that was still clutching onto the Mage. After applying enough strength for me to feel the intent behind his grasp, he stated in a cynical tone, “What if I were to break your arm for no reason? That’s not a ‘life-threatening’ injury, after all. Could you forgive me for that?”

“……”

“What if I were to rape you here? Will you say, ‘It doesn’t matter because I like him?'”

"……" I tried to deny him.

Seo Dawon saw me open my mouth to answer and pulled at my hand violently. "Why are you only denying with your words? Right now, it feels like you're unable to shake off my hand."

When I heard that, I belatedly tried to push his arm away; however, strangely, my hands remained still. It felt like they were submerged in very deep water, and their mobility was reduced due to great pressure. I couldn't move my arm up and down easily; in the end, I couldn't push him away.

As he said, I couldn't defend myself against the threat of his attacks. My body simply didn't have the will to defend itself. That was absolutely shocking.

"Now…"

"……"

"I think you finally understand." With that said, Seo Dawon stood up. A deep shadow cast over me as he moved away.

However, I couldn't let him go.

The Mage believed that I only liked him because of the scenario or the quirks of the system… The thought that he held those foolish beliefs while looking down at me every night made my head steam and my temper rise.

I clenched my teeth and called out to him. "[Seo Dawon], this is a 'command.' Don't leave. Stay here."

Seo Dawon's red eyes flashed, and two shadows fell on the blinds next to the bed.

The mage stopped in his attempt to turn around and stared at me. I slowly raised my torso, using his rigid, doll-like arms.

Finally, we were face to face. After wiping away the tears that threatened to spill due to anger, I could finally speak to my heart's content. "Hey,

you…”

“Yes.”

“Are you an i-idiot? You…refused my blood when I slit my palm for you. You said that there’s another way. Why are you acting like you’re the only one that can resist the system…and not me?”

“……” Seo Dawon didn’t answer, but he blinked obediently. His current expression was my favorite. I glared at him resentfully and embraced his head.

Judging from his reaction, the Mage seemed determined to dismiss all my advances as something manipulated by the scenario or a trick from the system.

More than knowing that the Mage desired my blood, it felt more despairing to know that Seo Dawon doubted my feelings and wanted to distance himself from me. He even thought he was acting on my behalf–to ‘protect’ me.

‘Since when was he such a romantic…?!’ The more I thought about it, the angrier I became. So, he’ll start to distance himself even more to ‘protect’ me? His judgment was awful.

That, at least, was clear.

It seemed like Seo Dawon was disappointed in himself because he thought I would die. And, because of that, he wanted to push me away? A while ago, he was so overwhelmed with jealousy–he showed off so much in front of Han Kiseok… I didn’t ask that from him…!

‘Thinking about it, he’s so overprotective…’

What was even more amusing was his confidence that he’d be able to kill me.

Seo Dawon liked me more than he realized. That was absolutely clear. However, if I were to ask him to confirm this fact, he’d deny everything.

He’d probably continue to think up words to scar my heart. Like today, he’d try to scare me so that I’d run away on my own. At the same time, if a person like Han Kiseok stumbled around my vicinity, he’d gladly interrupt. Even if I try to reject the suitor, he’d interrupt. I could clearly see his pained struggles as he tries to let me go, despite the very idea of being apart from me bringing him agony.

“Seo Dawon, this is a command.”

“Yes.”

“Close your eyes and stay still.”

His jewel-like red eyes vanished, as if they had been sucked into his skull. [efn_note] This is… I believe a poetic way to say “his red eyes vanished from view.” Except, I have a horrible mental image now. [/efn_note]

I slowly circled the IV needle stuck in the back of my hand. I deliberately tore at the skin while still leaving the needle stuck inside.

Blood billowed up along the torn line; in that state, I walked over to the Mage on my knees. Then, I raised my bleeding hand and swept it against his cheek. His cheeks slightly twitched in response to the scent of blood, but he did not open his eyes, still faithful to my ‘command.’

So, I was able to comfortably kiss his lips. Seo Dawon didn’t move, but the moment my lips met his, my ‘command’ had already subsided. The Mage slowly opened his eyes.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: You can do it, Lee-kyung-ah. Chastise your man and his self-destructive actions. Also!!! He finally initiated a kiss!!!!

Also RIP Koo Hui-seo. Lee-kyung thinks anything shady that happens was the ex-chimera’s fault. TBF, Koo Hui-seo does act shady.

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Chapter 259

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Blinking, Seo Dawon looked down at me. I kept looking at him and watched his growing bewildered expression as he shook off my control.

As soon as he came to his senses, he instinctively grabbed my shoulders, but that was all. I already knew that, no matter how strong his grip may be, he wouldn’t be able to crush my shoulders.

So, I closed my eyes and gave him another kiss. Seo Dawon rested his hand on top of mine, which was laying on his cheek. I wondered if he’d push me off, but he didn’t.

I could faintly smell the sanitized scent of the hospital room and the smell of blood, but Seo Dawon didn’t look as if he’d lose himself to bloodlust. His eyes were uncloudy and focused on me.

“…….” I briefly took my lips off his and stared at the Mage. He closed and opened his eyes before immediately turning an indecipherable gaze on me.

The mage was someone who could calm himself and instantly hide his emotions. However, right now, I could see the painstaking efforts the Mage took to keep calm–I could see through the facade.

“Are you going to continue to control me through ‘commands?'” So, even though his tone was sharp, I didn’t feel too uncomfortable.

I answered frankly, “No. I already knew I didn’t need to ‘command’ you.”

With that said, I raised and flaunted the torn skin on the back of my hand. Seo Dawon’s eyes fixated on the wound and the flowing blood.

Since I was admitted to the hospital, I had, for the first time in a long while, been able to escape the watchful eyes of the other Servants. Even after watching a movie or playing with Lackey, I had a lot of free time, so I fell into contemplative moods every so often.

To be honest, I was almost always thinking about the Mage. I wanted to know his reactions to when I had first gotten injured; I was curious about his intentions–what he meant by the pile of pebbles on my bedside table.

However, what dominated my thoughts the most was something the Mage had said earlier.

‘The fact that he’s alive and breathing makes me inferior.’

That was the first time I had felt…that Seo Dawon was being truthful about his affections and feelings for me; however, as the days went by, my heart began to feel heavy. Of course, those words implied he liked me, but, the more I thought about it, I could sense his deep underlying shame and self-loathing.

Shame. Was he perhaps pinpointing the issue inherent in the differences between the dead and the living?

However, Seo Dawon had not given up on life just because he died; he was bent on completing the resurrection scenario on the day he completes his revenge. Furthermore, his revenge was progressing smoothly.

Still, the pessimism laden in his words kept bothering me; the excessive control he exerted over me kept tugging on my senses as well.

Then, when Seo Dawon even cast skills on me to control himself, I thought…

'…Why doesn't he believe in himself?'

Of course, the Mage had just experienced catastrophic failure; he had even lost his life. Life-changing failures would often make someone reflect on their decisions and second-guess themselves.

However, his behavior was strange even for that situation. It almost felt like his failure worsened his perfectionist nature; his actions almost felt like a compulsion.

Of course, I've never been betrayed by someone I knew intimately. So, whenever Seo Dawon obsessively pushed himself and said something self-disparaging, I couldn't speak up. I doubted he'd listen to me–after all, it's hard to console someone if one hasn't experienced the victim's hurts personally.

The woman who loved him betrayed him; a cherished party member stole all that he accomplished. I couldn't even pretend to empathize…

I was afraid that my superficial consolation would wear him out instead. That's why I simply followed Seo Dawon's unreasonable leadership.

However, when the Mage called himself inferior to a nobody like Han Kiseok… It felt like I was smacked in the head.

That was completely ridiculous. If Seo Dawon were alive, Han Kiseok couldn't even dare hand Seo Dawon a business card. The Mage's status was **that** high.

Because of that… I realized that something was festering inside the Mage.

Seo Dawon was an excellent leader, and the team's successes and failures rode on him. His sense of responsibility, which always led him true,

strayed off the path this time. Perhaps he felt like the guild's failure was a personal failure.

Perhaps he felt that he had been too arrogant, blindfolded by consecutive successes; that he had ignored or was indifferent to the signs; or that his skills were lacking… Did the seeds of doubt eventually lead to serious misgivings?

So, no matter how successful his revenge was and how miserably he killed those that betrayed him…Seo Dawon might be afraid that he would fail again. Therefore, he paid close attention to any small or trivial injury that might befall me–he probably considered those injuries ominous signs.

That must be why Seo Dawon felt vaguely anxious every time I got hurt. Even though he had metaphorically wrapped me tight in bubble wrap, I would often escape the reaches of his control. Every independent step I took was a disaster for him.

I didn't connect the dots until today, but Seo Dawon's unstable appearance added confidence to my theory: the Mage was going crazy from his inability to control me.

"Even if I bleed–even if I don't block you with my commands–you won't be able to harm a single hair on my head… Just why should I be wary of you?" I dropped my 'command,' my control over my servant.

I wasn't trying to ostracize the Mage nor manipulate his feelings. I just wanted to show him something.

No, I *needed* to show him.

"A small amount like that–"

"No. No matter how much of my blood sprays out, you won't kill me. Your cravings for blood are just a means for a Necromancer to control you. Currently, the gap between our levels is too wide, so you can take as much as you please… You've had similar thoughts, right?"

I needed to show him how to accept his role in this Necromancer and Servant relationship.

“That’s why you’ve exploded now. A servant should be obedient, but you’re attempting to dominate me. That’s where it went wrong,” I said.

“What?”

“You don’t have to take responsibility for everything.”

The Mage raised his head.

Facing his gaze head-on, I continued to speak, “When you were alive, you were the face of the [Red Lotus] guild. You were the brain, moving people around as you desired and making all the calculated decisions. That’s why you thought that you needed to continue that role after you were resurrected–that’s a misunderstanding.”

“You……”

“However, you don’t. You’re just the best servant I have. And, to speak objectively and cold-heartedly, when you’re ‘inoperable,’ I still have Kim Olim and Jung Garam. Woo Ragi and Choi Kyung-sik can move independently as well.”

With that said, I looked straight into his eyes. “In other words, as long as I exist–even if none of you can act–our mission hasn’t failed.”

“……”

“That is to say, Seo Dawon, you only have to do what you can. You can’t control me. Accept that.”

“……”

“That’s my ‘command.'”

Rring–

As soon as I finished my ‘command,’ a system message notified me with an alert.

[Due to your startling and amazing accomplishment, your level has risen significantly.]

[How unbelievable–you’ve exerted your control and overcome the large gap between you and ‘Seo Dawon’, instilling obedience in the Servant.]

[Your domination over the Servant, ‘Seo Dawon,’ has risen significantly.]

[Your Servant’s, ‘Seo Dawon’s,’ attack power has increased.]

[The duration in which you can summon your Servant, ‘Seo Dawon,’ has increased.]

[Congratulations! As your bond has deepened, you can now access your Servant, ‘Seo Dawon’s,’ [current mood]. Once a day, don’t miss your chance to read your lovable servant’s inner feelings!]

The Mage slowly closed his eyes as I finished speaking. Then, after leaning on me, he collapsed. Startled, I dragged him into my embrace, but I was able to sweep away my worries. He had only briefly lost consciousness.

Seo Dawon’s face, which looked peaceful–as if he were in deep sleep–and the Mage’s even breathing made him look relaxed. Perhaps that’s just my biased perspective though.

I stared into Seo Dawon’s face for a long while and swept back the bangs on his forehead. A deep, complicated sigh tumbled out from my mouth.

Become a Patron!

TL: Yes, DOMINATE him. I'm so proud T_T That's a fair bit of emotional maturity from Lee-kyung. (And I've always thought Lee-kyung was emotionally mature and strong T_T)

Seo Dawon's actions have never been construed as healthy–even at the beginning of the novel. I really appreciate that. I think this chapter pretty realistically shows how a relationship can get super toxic even when you have the best intentions at the start. (Also, it does explain how Seo Dawon has gotten more and more sinister/overprotective from when he was first summoned.)

~~RIP, though. Han Kiseok loses again. I can't believe hamster called him a nobody!~~

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Chapter 260

Chapter 260

“What happened here?” Kim Olim, who came to my hospital room at dawn, adopted a scary expression when she saw the Mage sleeping in my arms.

Actually, her scary expression wasn’t the most frightening thing; one of her arms shone before a shield–her weapon–materialized in her hand. Worried that she may break the hospital room, I hurriedly shook my hands and made an excuse, “No, wait! There’s a lot of complicated things going on here…!”

“……”

Unfortunately, at that moment, Seo Dawon burrowed his head into my naked chest which my unbuttoned top did nothing to hide.

Actually, I had been a little embarrassed ever since the gown had come undone a few hours ago; plus, the room was chilly. I tried to button myself up again, but I couldn’t because the Mage was in the way. I was in the middle of trying to shake the Seo Dawon awake when Kim Olim walked in on us.

I could hardly bear to lift my flushed face and apologized to Kim Olim in a pleading voice, “That’s…S-Sorry… However, don’t misunderstand! It’s only the buttons!”

“The buttons?”

“…I was hot, so I unbuttoned them a bit.”

Kim Olim snorted, “Really? Then why are you cuddling Seo Dawon?”

“D-Don’t you know? You guys are…really cool to the touch.” I answered, turning my head away. How embarrassing–were these the best excuses I could concoct?

As expected, Kim Olim clicked her tongue as if she found me pathetic. Then, she vented her frustrations onto Seo Dawon, who still had his eyes closed. “How long are you going to pretend to be asleep and grope at Choi Lee-kyung?”

“…What?” I stared down at the Mage, dumbfounded.

Eyes still closed, Seo Dawon shamelessly said, “Don’t you know that you’re being a nuisance here, Olim-ah?”

“W-What! Seo Dawon…you!” I sputtered.

“Don’t get me wrong. I woke up when the door opened.” Despite the audience, the Mage kept leaning against me. I blinked at him, stunned…I was surprised to see a hitherto unseen expression on his face. How should I put this…The Mage looked like an office worker who didn’t want to get out of bed and go to work…

I wanted to stay in this moment–to continue to hug him like this, but Kim Olim’s gaze was so burdensome. I carefully pushed the Mage’s head away.

Only then did Seo Dawon lift himself from my embrace. Then, out of nowhere, he rolled himself up like an ammonite shell and plastered himself to my back; the Mage lifted Lackey, who had been clinging to the back of my neck, and dropped the skeleton to the ground.

[Clack Clack!]

“What are you doing!?” I shrieked.

“I want you to be able to rest.”

“What the…”

Lackey, whose sleep had been disturbed, stood up to try and bite at the Mage’s feet; I stared at them, still dazed.

However, the Mage didn’t stop there; he lightly took a hold of the skeleton and raised it up. He even ignored the skeleton’s attempts to bite his arms. “Sleep well. I’ll be back.”

“…W-Wait a minute! Why are you carrying Lackey away?”

“Lackey should also earn the right to eat.”

[Clack Clack Clack Clack!!!!]

Honestly…Lackey doesn’t even eat food…

However, Seo Dawon vanished in a bright light immediately after waving his hand. I briefly contemplated summoning Lackey back, but I decided to leave them for now.

But…

“I think we’ll need to talk for a long while. Necromancer.”

“Haah…”

As soon as the two disappeared, the hospital room’s atmosphere felt icy. I had no choice but to acquiesce and smile clumsily at the Paladin.

* * *

“I had definitely thought Seo Dawon’s attack strategy had become more cautious, but… I didn’t think he was so exhausted and weary–to the point he couldn’t control his impulses.”

I briefly explained to Kim Olim what had happened yesterday. (Though… I omitted things like the K…iss…and such for the sake of my dignity and her peace of mind.)

Kim Olim did not verbally express her agreement but listened to me very carefully while nodding her head. Then, she gave her own opinion. The issue, though, was that she was far more conservative than even Seo Dawon on matters of my safety.

She had admitted that the Mage was a bit excessive, but she did defend his assertions. “However, Necromancer, I don’t think Seo Dawon was being overprotective. I think his judgment on the matters of your safety is correct.”

“But… Seo Dawon thinks he’s going to kill me?”

“If you’re talking about his ‘impulse for blood,’ then I’ve felt it a few times as well. All the servants, probably, feel that desire to some extent.” With that said, the Paladin stared at the torn skin on the back of my hand. It felt like the atmosphere in the room changed as she eyed my wound.

I was a little flustered–this was the first time that Kim Olim had reacted to my blood in my presence. Instinctively, I used my other hand to cover the wound; only then did the melancholy bloodlust that permeated the room subside.

In front of my anxiety-frozen self, the Paladin had stood with her eyes closed for a long time. Her complicated expression returned to normal after a moment; that abrupt change made my mind even more flustered.

The Paladin looked directly at me, “I was able to resist my impulses because Seo Dawon instructed me not to act according to instinct… You’re too naive and narrow-sighted.”

I was shocked and speechless. I had thought that Kim Olim would be the least likely person to hurt me.

However, I soon felt that the current situation was similar to Seo Dawon's. That was to say… It felt like she was intentionally scaring me into hiding away–retreating.

However, if Seo Dawon was the type to yield to me because of his affections, Kim Olim was the type to be more strict because of her affection for me.

'…What should I do?'

Still deep in contemplation, I stared at Kim Olim. Her face was stern–there were no gaps. Not even a crack. It was clear that any possible retort would be destroyed.

In the end, I answered frankly, "But… I've never thought that you'd hurt me. You're…I mean…You wouldn't suppress someone weaker than you."

Kim Olim opened her mouth briefly at my words, then clamped her mouth shut without saying anything. Then, she adopted a complicated expression before sighing deeply. "Of course, I'm someone that values honor, but… I haven't lived a noble life–not as much as you'd expect. I wasn't strong enough to not compromise my values."

"……"

"You seriously…think of me as some kind of knight. I appreciate it, but…" She looked at me as if she were looking at a child.

I couldn't understand her complicated expression. Scratching the back of my neck, I replied, "You are a knight though."

Kim Olim has always lived such a righteous life; I couldn't understand her denial of her character. Even the other guild members in [Red Lotus] agreed… Even a bastard like Bae Jaemin had said that he regretted being unable to sway Kim Olim to his side.

However, Kim Olim seemed surprised by my firm belief in her. Disconcerted, she asked, “Why do you think so highly of me? I’ve never done anything great in front of you.”

Though the [Vengeful Ghost Memories] came to mind, I decided not to say anything. These memories weren’t topics I ever wanted to discuss with the Servants.

However, Kim Olim must have assumed something–whatever it may be–from my brief silence. She scanned my face before eventually retreating one step. “…That’s right. Even though I feel that urge, I have no desire to bite you. I agreed with Seo Dawon’s order; that’s why he and I always took turns staying by your side.”

“That’s what I thought.” I smiled.

However, Kim Olim frowned at my smile. I knew what she would say when I saw the Paladin’s expression. I was sorry to describe it as nagging, but that was the face she would make just before she went to nag at me.

The words that came out of her mouth was just absurd.

“However, putting aside me and Seo Dawon, you’re still too un-vigilant. Not just Koo Hui-seo… But, for example, Jung Garam has bitten and licked at your skin.” She suddenly started to pressure me by bringing up the Assassin.

“Yeah, but Jung Garam has always been mischievous…”

“The most worrisome part of all this is your easy-going nature–you think Jung Garam has a playful personality. Jung Garam isn’t someone who jokes around often.” With that said, she encouraged me to carry [Sylph’s Fall] on me at all times. “Retrieve [Fall] from Seo Dawon again. If you’re left alone with Jung Garam, and you’re seriously hurt, you’ll need it.”

“I’m telling you, that’s too much. I can’t do that.”

“You don’t even need to swing it. It’ll be enough to keep him in check.” Kim Olim looked so serious.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: That’s…really scary. Kim Olim is so grave right now. Also, It’s strange to see the way Kim Olim speaks about herself. I wonder what you guys think of her dynamic with Lee-kyung…and what she’s said to him. In a way, I do think Kim Olim is someone Lee-kyung idolizes, but I would do the same???

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Chapter 261

Chapter 261

“Hello?”

Just at that moment, I felt a presence behind us; soon, Jung Garam warped next to me. Usually, Jung Garam and Kim Olim would come see me together, but the Paladin came a little early today.

Slightly on edge due to my earlier conversation with her, I almost jumped in my seat. However, I managed to endure.

“Hah? So suspicious,” Jung Garam said.

“….Y-Yeah? What’s suspicious?”

“What’s with that expression just as you saw me?”

I’m a horrible actor…

Jung Garam gave me a grin and stared at me; when I became rigid, he paused before staring at Kim Olim. And…

“Noona, you talked about me behind my back, right~?” [1] He immediately asked Kim Olim.

I looked at the Paladin in surprise–how had Jung Garam noticed so quickly? As soon as I looked at her, though, I realized the reason for the Assassin’s startling perceptiveness.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about…” It seemed that Kim Olim wasn’t good at controlling her facial expression either! She turned away from Jung Garam with a stiff expression; anyone could see she was hiding something.

I looked alternating between the two, fidgeting because I was anxious we’d be found out at this rate. Surprisingly, though, Jung Garam stared at us before sitting down on the remaining chair with a grin on his face. “Well… I guess it’s something you’re not telling me because I don’t need to know, right?”

“…….”

“That’s right. It’s nothing. You don’t need to worry about it,” Kim Olim said.

“You really did gossip, huh~” Jung Garam swung his feet and stared at the Paladin; Kim Olim, on the other hand, kept silent and looked blankly at the wall. It was so obvious that she was avoiding his gaze.

Like that, a cold silence persisted for about 10 minutes. Of course, Kim Olim and I were the only ones who felt uncomfortable; Jung Garam played games on my phone nonchalantly.

However, when the dawn began to break, Jung Garam, who had been absorbed in his game for a while, began to talk to Kim Olim. “Noona, didn’t you say you were going to go to the airport to see who arrived today?”

“…I did. But, wasn’t Choi Kyung-sik the one that was going to come and take care of Choi Lee-kyung today?”

“Kyung-sik-ie spent 20 straight hours making medicine and became tired. So, I said I’d trade shifts with him.”

“Is he finished with his medicine?”

“He said it’s almost done?”

“I see…” Kim Olim momentarily adopted a conflicted expression. She would have to leave me alone with the person she warned me against–the person that she found dangerous enough to recommend that I arm myself with [Sylph’s Fall].

I read her inner conflict and took the initiative, “You’ll be busy, so go ahead. Garam-ie is here anyway…”

“…Understood. I’ll strive to return in two hours.”

“You don’t have to strain yourself…”

“Jung Garam, you shouldn’t act rashly either.”

“Yeah, yeah~”

After looking at me with lingering thoughts blaring from her expression, Kim Olim eventually vanished from the room.

As soon as Kim Olim disappeared, Jung Garam smiled and put the phone on the table as if he were waiting for this moment. Then, he immediately started interrogating me. “What were you guys talking about?”

“N-Nothing much…”

“What do you mean? You have a horrible poker face.” Jung Garam approached me, as if he were urging me to put aside my lies. Then, he reached out his hand to me; however, he stopped before he could grab my collar and tilted his head. “Hm? But, where is that dog…I mean Lackey? I thought something was missing around here…”

“Ah, Dawon-ie took him.”

“He took Lackey…?” It looked as if the assassin couldn’t believe I docilely let the Mage take the skeleton. ‘Did you simply stare at Seo Dawon and do nothing?’ Garam’s gaze seemed to convey.

I suddenly felt like a terrible human being who handed over a beloved puppy to a stranger. So, I hurriedly added, “That’s… Seo Dawon had a job

for Lackey, so I let him borrow it for a while…”

“I bet you won’t see it again.”

“Dawon-ie isn’t that kind of person!”

“Pffthahaha! You’re the only one who thinks that way about Dawon-hyung.” Jung Garam laughed as if heard something particularly funny. I glared at Jung Garam, trying to understand the way Red Lotus viewed their guildmaster.

From my point of view, they were well-suited and intimate enough to be together in death…

‘Even so, they distrust each other… Especially when it comes to each other’s personal character. They’re harsher on each other than strangers…’

It was unbelievable that they became one of the best guilds in the world with this sort of teamwork. Woo Ragi seemed to follow Seo Dawon’s directions well, but even he drew a line at personal matters.

Was this the so-called ‘dividing your private life from your professional life?’

Ignorant of my complicated feelings, Jung Garam continued to tease affectionately, “Well, Dawon acts like he’s missing a few screws around you, but… don’t let your guard down around him too much.”

“Why do you guys distrust each other like this?”

“Me? I trust Dawon-hyung. But, you trust way too much–that’s an issue,” Jung Garam said. Even though he was so young, his expression looked both cheeky and mature.

Frowning, I answered, “You seem to be misunderstanding something… Seo Dawon can’t do anything against me now.”

“Pfthahahaha!”

“I’m serious. I disciplined Dawon a little yesterday.”

Jung Garam now puffed up his cheeks trying to hold back his giggles, like this was some ‘don’t laugh’ challenge. Poking his puffy cheeks, I said, “So, don’t worry. I’ll handle it.”

“Huh? What the. Something really happened?”

“A lot happened…”

Jung Garam stood still, as if he were waiting for me to continue speaking; however, I didn’t intend to bring up these matters.

Perhaps he noticed my reticence; the assassin eventually gave up and approached me. Then, in a childish voice, he whined, “I’m bored.”

“Play more games.”

“Can I lie down next to you?”

As soon as I heard that, a voice that sounded like Kim Olim’s said “Refuse” in my head, but I nodded gently. When I scooched aside a little, Jung Garam clambered atop the bed without any hesitation.

After using my arm like a pillow and getting comfortable, he started up his game. Since it was a racing game, the phone was quite loud every time the Assassin used the booster.

“You’re pretty good at that.”

“I’m 7th place though?”

It was a little awkward between us. I just told him he was doing well because it seemed like the Assassin was working hard… Jung Garam continued to mumble as he pressed away at the touch screen, “Ah, before I died I was really good at this game.”

“……”

“These bastards–for three years, I’ve just been stagnating.” He lost a few games in a row. I thought Jung Garam would throw his phone in frustration, but the Assassin was persistent. Later on, he even avoided losing in one or two games.

The sight of his carefree and happy face made me feel like my conversation with Kim Olim was for nothing. Besides, I felt sleepy just watching Garam playing games… I drooped, nearly asleep, and came close to head-butting the Assassin. He yelped and remarked, “You’re a spy for that team aren’t you?”

“Ah, Sorry…”

“You tired?”

“Mmhmm…” I was going to ask him to wake me up when the doctors were making their rounds, but my yawn interrupted that desire.

When I opened my mouth to yawn, my chin brushed against his soft hair. I flinched a little, because it was itchy. I was a bit nervous, but Jung Garam didn’t say anything even though I was literally pressing down on his head. He was completely focused on his game.

Looking at him playing, drowsiness washed over me yet again. Eventually, I closed my eyes; exhaustion broke through the floodgates. By that time, it felt like Jung Garam was curling into my embrace, but it was too late. My consciousness was already flying away.

“…Choi Lee-kyung, are you sleeping?”

Someone, probably Jung Garam, whispered to me. I didn’t react at all–my body was too heavy.

Soon afterwards, I felt a soft touch on my collarbone, but the touch didn’t necessarily bother me. Then, my mood soured because the touch soon turned into what felt like licking; however, I couldn’t shake it off because I was already falling into a deep, coma-like sleep.

“Really…” I heard brief snippets of a voice; something prickled at the back of my nape, but even that was fine.

I plunged into a deep slumber.

* * *

“……Huh?” I raised my torso off the bed, startled, when I saw the dim hospital room.

I had slept so well that the sun was already setting outside the window; the corners of my lips were damp with drool. When I automatically raised my hand to wipe it, I had an IV connected to the back of my hand, unlike before I had fallen asleep.

“I got an IV? Wow, I don’t remember a thing…” I sat absentmindedly, wiping off my saliva with my sleeves. It felt a little awful to have my day cut so short from a nap. Furthermore, I felt belatedly lightheaded from turning my head so fast.

“Ah, So dizzy…Did I sleep too much?” I muttered while slipping one foot off the bed, trying to go to the bathroom. Suddenly, the dim room shined with light.

“Argh!” Surprised, I looked towards the switch; there, a handsome man leaned against the wall with an annoyed expression and his arms crossed across his chest.

It was Woo Ragi.

Become a Patron!

TL: He’s back! Our resident homophobe!

Footnotes

1. Jung Garam is acting cutesy here, but I wasn’t sure how to show it in tone…except with a tilda.

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Chapter 262

Chapter 262

“W-When did you get here?” I asked, bewildered.

Woo Ragi answered docilely, “Four hours ago.” Then, he looked at me for a moment. As his eyes scanned over me, his brows furrowed noticeably when he looked at my nape.

Surprised, I inadvertently followed his gaze and pressed at that area with my hand; I felt a throbbing pain. When I looked down, I saw an unfamiliar gauze attached to the skin near my collarbone.

‘…Did they attach a dressing to me here as well?’ I wondered. It was the first time I’d ever seen it. Woo Ragi approached and reached out his arm, as if he were about to touch my hand.

I inadvertently backed away from him. As soon as I did so, Woo Ragi’s expression changed minutely–some incomprehensible, strange emotion. Then, he neatly retrieved his hand, as if he had abandoned all thought of touching me. I was left standing there, bewildered. “Wh…What?”

“Don’t touch that.” Woo Ragi sat on the chair normally utilized by the nurses and stared resolutely away. The servants were probably taking turns to watch over me, but… I was still unfamiliar with Woo Ragi, so I felt very awkward and shy.

“Excuse me… Have you seen Garam-ie? Did he leave while I was sleeping?”

I couldn’t really turn on the TV in this situation, and it’d be weird to eat alone as well…

I spoke cautiously to Woo Ragi, but, strangely, the swordsman didn’t answer even though he heard me. He simply gave me an icy glare, like he was trying to convey, ‘Why is this bastard trying to act friendly?’

Normally, I would fidget and fiddle with my cell phone out of anxiety, but I somehow felt weirdly emotional. Woo Ragi, I know you’re always such a jerk, but…

“Hey, I want to eat an apple…” I said.

“What?”

The fact that he’s ignoring me made me want to drag him into a conversation even more.

I couldn’t resist the urge and tried to talk to Woo Ragi. As expected, he gave me a look that seemed to say, ‘What bullshit are you spouting now?’

When our eyes met, I gave him a sheepish smile–that seemed to only offend him more. Woo Ragi said, with an irritated expression, “So, you want to eat an apple. What do you want from me?”

“I’m a patient…and you’re my servant.”

“Do you want to get beaten?”

”No, I want to eat an apple.”

“……” Woo Ragi was momentarily struck speechless; he looked me up and down. It was as if he was wondering whether or not an imposter was wearing my skin.

‘It’s easy to read his face…’ I grinned and raised my torso up off the bed. Then, making sure the swordsman could see, I whined and lifted the patient’s table attatched to the bed.

Woo Ragi looked at the table; sure enough, he looked as if he was going to beat me up.

Of course, I thought the swordsman would curse at me, but Woo Ragi unexpectedly took an apple out of the fruit basket and silently placed it atop the bedside table. Then, he took out a finger-sized, thin dagger from his inventory and began to peel it.

‘What’s this? He’s become kind…’

Surprised by his unnatural docile attitude, I looked at the swordsman. I observed him carefully, trying hard not to admire his features. Even though he was just peeling an apple, the swordsman’s unrealistic appearance made me feel like I was an audience for a master performing his cultural arts. [1]

I stared blankly at the shadows cast by his eyelashes; my mouth watered slightly when I saw the apple pieces lying side by side on the plate. The swordsman took a neatly cut slice and lifted it quickly…then, he placed it in his mouth.

“What…are you doing?” I asked.

He chewed an apple he couldn’t even eat and spat out the mushed remains in the trash can.

Even after seeing my incredulous reaction, Woo Ragi silently took another apple slice and chewed it in his mouth. I felt annoyed to see the half-eaten apple slices being thrown away, “You *really* loathe the thought of giving me any?”

“You should be grateful that I haven’t beaten you up.”

“You cheapskate.”

“Hilarious. Did you really stare at this thinking I’ll give it to you?” Woo Ragi giggled while looking at my expression. At that moment, he looked supremely childish–a low-quality human being.

I gave and simply reached out for the fruit basket. I was hungry; I might as well eat the remaining apple, skin and all.

However, when I reached out, the fruit basket suddenly retreated backwards. I tried to follow it with an outstretched hand, but it retreated again.

Temper rising at his mockery, I glared into the swordsman's face with bloodlust in my eyes. Suppressing laughter, he pulled the basket towards his side and said languidly, "Do you want some?"

"Yeah."

"Ask politely."

"……" I wanted to shove a mirror into Woo Ragi's face to show him his own expression. It would be impossible to not get furious at the combination of such a malicious expression and elegant voice…

I gave up and continued to glare at him; Ragi, that bastard, began to spear all of the fruits in the basket, one by one.

My stomach rumbled as the sweet smell wafted through the air (and he definitely heard it too), but that guy refused to give me any. He just piled fruits on the small plate, like a cake, and acted as if he was going through them all away into the trash bin.

"I'm going to tell Dawon what you did…" I mumbled.

"Wow, so scary. Make sure to tell him everything."

"……" I had even taken out my secret card, Seo Dawon, but Woo Ragi didn't even lift an eyebrow.

But a few minutes later, the fruit plate was placed atop the side table. Half amazed, I reached out; once again, though, the plate retreated again. "Ah, honestly!"

Woo Ragi giggled and finally handed me the plate; finally, I was able to dine on the fruit. Woo Ragi stared at me eating. When our eyes met, he spouted provocative fighting words. “You eat like a pig.”

“Why do you always speak like that?”

“I said you look like a pig because you’re eating like a pig.”

“Have you never been sued for slander during your lifetime as a User?”

“You’re really persistent with your quips. Just eat your apple.” Woo Ragi threw the fruit’s peel at me and smacked me right on my forehead.

I was incredibly frustrated and melancholy, but I was so hungry. The fruits were cut into bite-sized pieces as well. So, I decided to endure. “Where’s Garam-ie?” After eating for a while, I got bored again so I made conversation with the Swordsman who was staring absentmindedly out the window.

“He went home. Can’t you see?”

”Why didn’t wake me up during meal time?” I was a bit curious; Kim Olim and Garam-ie unconditionally woke me up at those times to hand me the medicine that came with my meal.

Woo Ragi was momentarily struck speechless, then said in a despicable tone, “Are you thinking about eating more while you’re already eating?”

“No, that’s not it… Argh, Why are you always trying to pick a fight?!”

“For an uggo, you’re really gluttonous.”

That made me even more upset because the swordsman was so handsome.

Regardless of my anger, Woo Ragi said, “I cut it for you anyway, if you don’t eat it I’ll gut you.” I glared, picked up my laid-down fork, and began devouring the fruit again. The fact that the fruit was so disgustingly delicious made me sorrowful.

‘Come to think of it, I’m hungrier than usual…’

At first, I thought I’d have leftovers, but I was still a little hungry even after I finished the fruits. Watching Woo Ragi out of the side of my eye, I glared at the fruit left in the basket.

‘I want to eat two of the bananas in there…’

Instead of giving me more fruit, the swordsman took out a black flask from his inventory. “Drink this.”

“What is it?”

“Choi Kyungsik said to give it to you.”

“What kind of medicine is that?”

“Dunno.”

His answer was pretty flippant, but I still took the flask.

The issue, though, was the appearance of the potion. It was colored black, and a cloud of dark smoke was rising from the opening. Honestly, it’s not like this is some ready-to-eat hot delivery food or something…

“Are you sure this is edible?” I asked.

“……”

I couldn’t really blame him for being silent in this situation. The smoke didn’t really please me, but perhaps the taste would be fine? I opened the lid and took a quick sniff.

“Urgh…” My expectations were betrayed, and a horrible smell pierced my nose. It smelled like three-days-old, rotten socks were left in a smoker.

Become a Patron!

TL: Honestly, Woo Ragi insults people like it's his last line of defense to show that he has no emotions. He's such a despicable character (in some sense). But, also, I can't help but notice that he looked worried about Choi Lee-kyung's wound…and how he did eventually cut all the fruits into bite-sized pieces for our hamster.

Still. Be nice!

Footnotes

1. The original word used here is 'intangible cultural asset master' or a master of crafts for an art that's been registered with the UNESCO world heritage organization. These sorts of people are often given funds to continue practicing their arts and given an exemption from military service.

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“How am I supposed to drink this?”

“Who told you to get sick?” Woo Ragi simply shrugged his shoulders, unconcerned since it didn’t involve him.

It felt like drinking this would worsen the disease rather than cure it. I felt like throwing up just from the scent–did this make any sense?

However, when I placed the flask on the side table, Woo Ragi clicked his tongue and threatened me. “Drink every last drop.”

“Are you serious?”

“Kim Olim told me to make you drink it even if I have to do it by force.” With that said, he cracked his knuckles; a cold shiver ran up my spine. It was clear that the man would break my neck to feed me the entire potion.

“Nngh…” Faced with no choice, I covered my nose and poured a spoonful into my mouth. The taste was even worse than the scent–it was surprising how much worse it was.

‘Why is the texture like runny boogers…?’

I couldn’t control my expression because of the sticky texture and musky taste. My entire face frowned as I looked towards the swordsman; the potion wouldn’t go down my throat.

However, Woo Ragi didn’t stop with his blood-boiling comments even when he saw my tearful face.

Rather, he was even smiling openly, as if he was pretending to ignore my suffering. Perhaps I should say he was appreciating my distorted expression to the fullest. Unwilling to look at his face any longer, I tightly shut my eyes.

He said, in a smooth voice, “They say that bitter things are good for your body.”

“……”

“Did you really think you’d die from this?”

Anyone could see he wasn’t worried and instead found delight in my discomfort. However, there was no way to avoid this situation, so I barely managed to swallow.

[Alchemist ‘Choi Kyung-sik’s’ potion has restored 0.1% of the cracks in your soul.]

A strange alert manifested before my eyes.

“Cracks in my soul…?”

“……”

It was so strange. I observed the flask everywhere until I discovered a small label on the bottom. As soon as I found that label, a system message popped up.

[Potion to recover your injuries]

Type: Potion
Durability: 1
Level Restriction: None
Special Skill: Soul Recovery

Description:

A potion created for a special purpose by the Alchemist ‘Choi Kyung-sik.’ This potion is optimized for the User ‘Choi Lee-kyung.’

It’s a potion that restores the soul of a User that has been exposed to a serious psychic attack. Though it may taste horrible, its effect is excellent.

Magic Resistance +1,800
Nightmare Barrier +2,500
Curse Resistance +15,000

This potion has a certain effect against sleepwalking. (However, you must drink the potion for at least 30 consecutive days)]

—

After reading the system message, I asked the swordsman in a trembling voice, “No way… I’ll have to take this continuously for 30 days?”

“No? According to Choi Kyung-sik, it’s only useful if you drink it for 60 straight days.”

“…What?” Just one mouthful made my eyes water. I’d have to drink something like this for two months? My hands shook; I wondered if there was anything I could do to get out of drinking this.

‘Should I pretend to accidentally drop it?’

However, before I could even implement my plan, someone warped into the hospital room.

“Did you sleep well?” It was Seo Dawon, carrying a drooping lackey by his side.

* * *

“What’s happened to Lackey?”

“I took good care of it, of course,” Seo Dawon said mischievously, smiling as he handed over the drooping, limp skeleton. What a horrible personality.

At first glace, Lackey seemed exhausted. When I reached out to it, its finger twitched, but that was all. Its eyes remained closed, heavy and tired.

‘Just what on earth happened…’

When I hugged Lackey, half-worried and half-investigatively, I was surprised. Normally it was quite cool to the touch, but the skeleton was freezing, like someone had left it in the freezer for a day.

I looked at the Mage with questioning eyes. However, Seo Dawon was in the middle of an incomprehensible conversation with Woo Ragi in the far corner. “Kim Olim dragged him away.”

“Don’t let him come around for a while.”

“It seems you have a lot of complaints, huh?”

After that was said, their conversation ended unnaturally, as if they could sense my attention. Then Woo Ragi got up from his seat and said farewell only to the Mage. “Then, I’m going now.”

“Yeah.”

Before I could get a sense of what was happening, Woo Ragi’s body melted into the surroundings and vanished. Then, the Mage approached me.

“What were you guys talking about?” I asked.

“I’ll tell you after you finish drinking that flask.”

“Ah…” I frowned and looked at the remaining potion.

If I didn’t already know what it tasted like, I would have gulped it down in one instant, but… I wasn’t ignorant. My mouth refused to open. Just imagining drinking the liquid made my stomach upset and flip over.

“About Choi Kyung-sik… He definitely hates me…”

“Really?”

“Otherwise, he wouldn’t have made this taste so gruesome…” Afterwards, I clamped my mouth shut–the Mage opened the lid of the flask. Seo Dawon sniffed at it and frowned slightly–as expected, he couldn’t stand the disgusting scent either.

Even with his brows furrowed, Seo Dawon still leaned the flask towards his lips and took a sip. Startled, I stared at him; something more astonishing happened afterwards.

With the potion still in his mouth, the mage approached me and grabbed my chin. Then, he grabbed my cheek.

“Wait, wai–…”

“……”

The mage’s lips stopped just short, as if he were pretending to listen to me, but the Mage soon smiled and kissed me.

The repulsive scent brushed past my nose first, but it soon ceased to be a problem. As soon as his lips opened and his tongue pushed past mine, all unpleasantness was neutralized. Despite the terrible taste, the Mage started to lick my mouth; my blood boiled with excitement.

Strangely elated, my fingers and toes began to curl. I wanted to hold back my groan, but soon my ears and the small hospital room filled with my embarrassing, gasping noises.

Seo Dawon willfully violated my tongue until I pushed him away.

However, that wasn't the end.

"W-Wait…D-Don't drink that…!" I swallowed the liquid in my mouth. Seo Dawon casually brought the flask up to his lips, as if he were going to take another sip and tilted his face towards my mouth.

I grabbed his wrist in a hurry and tried to plead with him.

The Mage shrugged his shoulders, as if he couldn't see what was wrong. "You said you couldn't bear to drink it, though?"

"No…. It's not…" I was going to say that wasn't the problem, but the blanket began to slip off from my movements. I rushed to grab the blanket; that was the last bastion of defense to cover what was between my legs…

The problem though, was that my attempts to hide myself were so blatant. With flushed cheeks, I shouted at the grinning Mage, "I-I'll drink it by myself! I'll drink it right now!"

"Well, that's alright by me…"

I ripped the flask away from the Mage's hand, ignoring his amused voice.

Then, I closed my eyes tightly, blocked my nose with a hand, and drank it in one shot. I could only manage to drink the rest of the potion by shoving the potion down my throat, suffocating myself to the point of vomiting. I was exhausted from drinking it all and sprawled onto the bed.

Seo Dawon stared at my languid body and pushed at the skeleton in my arms. Normally, the Lackey would have growled at the mage, but today it blinked once before closing its eyes, as if it were falling asleep.

"…What did you do today?" I asked, fiddling with my hair.

Seo Dawon swept my bangs in a strange direction before responding in a dry and flippant tone, "I doted on Lackey a lot before coming here."

"You didn't abandon it in a freezer?"

"Oh, good idea. I'll take that into consideration for the future."

I glared at him in lieu of answering.

When Lackey heard my voice, it made the arduous effort to turn its skull towards me. Anyone could see that he was seriously bullied by the Mage for half a day.

I tried to pry more information out of the Mage but gave up when it seemed like he wouldn't budge. Instead, I stroked Lackey's skull to try and soothe the hardships it went through.

"Huh?" However, as I touched and observed the skeleton, I found a hitherto unseen accessory on its neck: a gold choker with a large ruby in the center.

"What's this?" I asked the Mage as I touched the ruby. He smiled softly.

At that moment, Lackey began gnashing its chin in its characteristic clacks.

[Clack Clack.]

[Master.]

The red ruby momentarily glittered alongside the skeleton's chin's movements, like neon lights flickering in their tubes. Then, I heard a mechanical sound coming from that jewel.

“Huh…?” I couldn’t understand what I had just heard, so I stared at the skeleton again. Lackey looked at me with its hollow eyes and gnashed its teeth again.

[Clack Clack.]

[Master.]

“H-How?” I looked at the skeleton in shocked amazement before whipping my head around to the Mage.

Seo Dawon replied nonchalantly, “I suppose I took some inspiration from ‘Bowlingual.'” [1]

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my god, Choi Kyung-sik is OP. What was that potion????

Also, ngl, I’m kinda weak to Woo Ragi.

Footnotes

1. It’s a device or toy sold by a Japanese company that proclaimed to translate dog language to humans. The dog would bark, and the toy

would automatically say the ‘meaning.’ This toy was sold in USA and South Korea as well.

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Bowlingual was a toy that briefly earned fame as a ‘machine that can interpret your dog’s barks.’ Whenever your dog barks, messages like ‘Give me food!’ would appear on this Tamagotchi-like-device. So, that functionality was somehow incorporated into this choker?

“Then, Lackey can talk now?” I asked.

“It can speak very simple words.”

“…Why did you make this so suddenly?”

“Lackey seems to enjoy it, though?” Seo Dawon smiled and dodged by shifting the attention onto Lackey.

As soon as the Mage finished speaking, Lackey answered with clacks of its own. After its teeth finished chattering, a dry, mechanical voice echoed out of the choker.

[Like it.]

“……” ‘Can I really trust that thing?’ I couldn’t help but suspect the convenient, well-timed choker and began fiddling with it. Lackey began making vibrations in the back of its throat.

[Clack Clack Clack].

[I like Master.]

Then, it grabbed my arm and burrowed its face into my embrace. Though I've often seen the skeleton rubbing its face on my body, this was somehow more emotional.

'So, I'll actually be able to understand it?'

Half convinced, I called up the skeleton's status window–the first time in a long while. "Lackey, status window!"

[Lackey — 'Choi Lee-kyung's' servant.

Rank: Medium-grade skeleton (Skeleton Soldier) +1

HP – 55,500/55,500
MP – 10,000/10,000
Loyalty: Very high
Attributes: Darkness, Evil, Perseverance, Obsession, Destruction.
Current Mood: 'It's difficult…but.'
Durability: Infinite (If it is attacked for more than its total health, the skeleton will be reversed summoned back into Choi Lee-kyung's personal system space, and the user will sustain the overflow damage. Re-summon Cooldown time: 24 hours)

.

.

Evolution – You currently lack the materials to evolve this servant.]

I looked at the status window, but there was nothing particularly different in it.

Although Lackey's current mood was a little vague, there was nothing like 'I hate this' or 'Please help me,' so it was difficult to press Seo Dawon for a proper explanation.

‘…Huh? Now that I think about it…’

While I browsed through Lackey’s status window, suddenly the system message that stated I had significantly increased my control over Seo Dawon bubbled up to the forefront of my mind. And, if I remembered correctly…

‘It said…I could view Seo Dawon’s [Current Mood], right…?’

I gulped down my pooling saliva and stared at the Mage.

When our eyes met, the Mage’s eyes looked soft. I shouted for his status window inwardly, hoping he wouldn’t feel or notice anything strange. ‘Seo Dawon, Status Window!’

[Seo Dawon – ‘Choi Lee-kyung’s’ servant.

Rank: Legendary Mage (8th circle)

.

.

Loyalty: Very high.]

As soon as the status window manifested, the loyalty section caught my eye. When he was first summoned, his loyalty was ‘very low,’ but now it changed to ‘very high.’

That wasn’t all.

[Attributes: Darkness, Anger, Charisma, Leadership, Wisdom, Artistry, Inspiration, Curse, Loyalty.

Title:

Sweet Submission – This title can be attained when you meet certain conditions in the ‘resurrected as a servant’ scenario. As long as you faithfully follow your master’s commands as a servant, you can exert a powerful strength.

<‘Sweet Submission’ increases all skill’s attack by 200%. However, this effect will not be applied to healing, cleansing, or light-based abilities.>

Dragon Slayer – violent, crazed dragon. A limited title given only to the first warriors to slay the Second Company’s ruler, Aestheya.

<The ‘Dragon Slayer’ title increases all physical and magical attacks by 150%>

Besides the unprecedented increase in his loyalty, there was a new addition to his ‘Title’ category. Furthermore, if Seo Dawon utilized that title…

I browsed his status window in a daze. The title’s effect seemed like a total fraud, but I wondered if this would be effective against Bae Jaemin. However, something definitely was better than nothing.

And, below that, I saw what I was most curious about: his [Current Mood].

[Current Mood: Press ‘HERE’ to activate your servant’s ‘current mood’ function. You can only check Servant ‘Seo Dawon’s’ mood once per day. Would you like to activate this?]

I took a sneaky glance at the Mage. He continued to stand still by my side, looking over me. It felt like he knew what I wanted to do but seemed

to think nothing much about it.

After my conscience and curiosity conflicted, I finally grabbed the Mage's hand. "I-If…"

"Yeah?"

"If I could read your thoughts… How would you feel?"

"Right now?"

"Yeah…."

Seo Dawon looked at me, thinking. "You've been able to read my mind since that last 'incident?'"

He was truly quick-witted. I nodded meekly. "That's… There are some restrictions, but… It's possible. At least, I think–I haven't tried yet."

"Ah." Seo Dawon exclaimed ambiguously before responding with a question. "Would you be fine with it?"

"Huh? Uh… If you're asking for my opinion… I really want to see your thoughts. B-But, I wouldn't force you to let me."

"If you want to see, then do it." Unexpectedly, the Mage had no qualms. If it were me, I would have hesitated for a little while.

'Of course, I'm Seo Dawon's Master, but… We're also in a r-relationship…?'

Well… I never really received a confession, so I was worried about the veracity of our relationship status, but…

However, I thought it was meaningless to argue about this point right after he fed me that disgusting potion with his mouth. I mean, even though Seo Dawon and I were in a contractual relationship, we still had a personal connection as well, right?

So, I wasn’t sure if it was a good or bad thing to be able to read his detailed inner thoughts. In a way, it was like I was invading the Mage’s most private domain.

After long contemplation, I sighed deeply and revealed my inner thoughts. “You know… You said you could hear whatever I said wherever you were, right?”

“Correct.”

“Then… It should be fair for me to read your mind once a day…?”

Seo Dawon stared blatantly at the crown of my head before bursting into laughter. Then, treating my complaint as the trivial grumble it was, he asked, trying to keep a straight face, “Do you want things to be fair?”

“Uh… It’s important to me.”

“If it were me, I would have already peeked.”

“…You’re someone with no conscience.”

Seo Dawon seemed to find it strange that I was even contemplating conceding this ability.

I stabbed my finger against this scam-like-beauty-of-a-man’s chest. [1] I wanted to physically express how little conscience he had.

After letting himself be pushed away a couple of times, he soon caught my fingers and kissed my fingertips. My ears felt like they were burning, but I didn’t want to snatch my fingers away.

After munching on my fingertips for a minute, he whispered, “Actually, I’d rather you look at my thoughts.”

“R…Really?”

“I also wonder what I’m thinking.”

"……"

"If it really bothers you, you can let me know what's written there."

"Ah… Should I?"

Somehow, it felt like he was giving me a good excuse…

I pretended to not notice his machinations and called forth the status window, glanced at the Mage, and pressed where I could begin to see his [Current Mood]. Soon afterwards, the instructions vanished and new letters gradually took their place.

[Current Mood: 'Cute.']

When I saw that very succinct word, I felt a little disarmed and discouraged. Inadvertently, I grumbled, "Is that it? Geez, I… Well, Lackey's thoughts were simple sentences too, but…"

"What did it say?"

"Well…." However, when I tried to inform the Mage, the words were strangely blocked in my throat.

Seo Dawon had a mysterious expression on his face; I flapped around, trying to hurriedly calm myself. However, the word 'cute,' kept bouncing around like a ping pong ball in my head; my thoughts were chaotic.

'Seo Dawon thinks I'm cute… Me…'

He simply stared at me curiously with his normal expression on his face; to think those were his inner thoughts…

"It's…It's nothing."

"If it's nothing, then why are you stuttering?"

"It's just….just…! Just… Pretty insignificant…." I spoke evasively and laid down on the bed with my back turned to the Mage. I felt a little guilty

because I was supposed to inform him of his inner thoughts, but that was nothing compared to my embarrassment.

However, Seo Dawon did not stop there; he leaned towards my prone body and whispered into my ear, “Are you disappointed with me?”

“What? N-No?”

“Really? You suddenly wouldn’t talk to me… I wonder if my inner thoughts displeased you.” His voice sounded a little low–a little subdued–but he probably did that on purpose. It was a shallow trick, but… But, I was still concerned.

‘That tone is such foul play…’

In the end, I had no choice but to endure the shame and confess to the Mage. I straightened my back, turned around, and looked into his eyes. “It’s not that… You… To me…”

“Yes?”

“Haah…” Despite my resolve, I hesitated in front of the Mage’s straightforward gaze.

He thought hard and asked, “Are you embarrassed?”

“Um… A little…?”

“Ah.” He blatantly stared at me and asked with a small smile, “Have you never looked at me and thought something like that?”

‘…What the heck? Did he already figure it out?’

It sounded like he already knew, so I nodded while staring back. Of course, I’ve thought that Seo Dawon was cute before. Actually, I’ve thought that many times…

‘I thought he was cute yesterday as well…’

The memory of him leaning, dazed, into my embrace was still vivid in my mind. Reminiscing, my cheeks slightly flushed; Seo Dawon gently stroked my cheek. “This [Current Mood] business is more explicit than I imagined.”

“Huh?”

The Mage mumbled something to himself; somehow the gleam in his eyes felt a bit dangerous.

Then, Seo Dawon pushed on my shoulder and gently laid me back on the bed. Slowly, he unfastened the buttons on my hospital scrubs. This was all too sudden!

“W-Wait a minute…!” Bewildered, I held my hands up; Seo Dawon stopped after undoing a couple of buttons and removed the gauze from my collarbone. In other words, maybe I was simply overreacting from an overactive imagination.

The Mage looked up from the gauze to stare at me with a questioning gaze. I shut my eyes tightly; I couldn’t bear my embarrassment.

“Does it sting?”

“Ah… A little?” Fortunately, the Mage didn’t tease me and stopped– perhaps because of my injury.

Only then did the tension seep out of my body; Seo Dawon took a potion out of his inventory and slowly rubbed at the wound with sterilized gauze.

As he did so, I glanced at the wound as well, curious. Under the gauze, there were straight cuts drawn into a cross symbol. “Did I have this scar before…?”

“Garam-ie did this in order to remove all the poison left in your body.”

“Oh?”

The Mage replaced the gauze and dressed the injury well, covering it from the outside elements.

Then, he placed a hand on my chest. I slightly flinched at the cold temperature that met my bare skin, but I tried to show no outward sign of discomfort. However, when the Mage saw my docile and still body, he smiled incomprehensibly and asked, “You’re not going to do anything?”

“Huh?”

“Then, you’ll let me act as I please, according to my [Current Mood]?”

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my my, Seo Dawon! Were you thinking naughty things?

Also, sorry for my grammar. I’m just really busy these past two weeks T_T I got a new cat! Join my discord for all the pics haha.

Footnotes

1. = like a highway robber.

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“What…?” I stared blankly at the Mage, unable to understand. Then, I looked between my exposed chest and his hand, which was casually placed on my skin. ‘What does he mean by ‘according to his [Current Mood]’…?’

No, more than anything, I couldn’t recognize the aura emanating from the Mage. Even though I did nothing but stare at him, my mouth felt dry. The atmosphere was tense–like something would happen soon.

[Clack Clack.]

[Master.]

At that moment, the previously docile Lackey burrowed into my arms.

Thanks(?) to that, I returned to my senses and shook off Seo Dawon’s arm. The Mage slowly removed his hand and stared at the skeleton. Then, leaning one elbow against the bed’s armrest, said, “I’m borrowing Lackey again today.”

Somehow, his voice exuded retaliatory intent.

Perhaps I was the only one who gleaned that nuance from the Mage’s words, but Lackey seemed to have understood Seo Dawon’s intentions as well. It started jumping up and down on the bed before desperately clutching the hem of my clothes and shaking its skull from side to side.

[Clack Clack!]

[Don’t wanna!]

…I finally believed that this choker actually conveyed Lackey’s true thoughts. As the skeleton clung desperately to my arms, I clumsily tried to mediate between the two. “B-by the way… What did you two do together?”

“……”

“You’re not bullying it, right?”

Seo Dawon continued to smile brightly. He then grabbed the choker around its neck with two fingers and pulled the skeleton to his side. Surprised by the rough behavior–the Mage basically grabbed Lackey by the collar!–I had no chance to react and stop him.

The Mage gently touched the ruby, and the jewel suddenly lit up. Lackey’s struggles intensified as well.

“What are you doing!” Startled, I reached out to the Mage, but he was even faster than me. In a gentle voice, still holding onto the skeleton by its collar, he said, “You want to play with me today, right?”

Lackey struggled and wildly shook its skull from side to side. Anyone could see that the skeleton seemed to despise that suggestion.

However…

[Clack Clack Clack!]

[Yes, I’d love to.]

The voice flowing from the ruby seemed to voice a different opinion. The tone sounded a little cheery; the dissonance between the voice and the skeleton’s attitude was vast.

“Stop tormenting it…!”

“What do you mean by ‘torment.’ I even crafted an interpreter for it.”

“Honestly, anyone can see that you’ve manipulated that thing.”

“No way.” Seo Dawon suddenly lowered his voice and whispered something into Lackey’s ear. I could hardly hear his voice even though I was close by; he must have done something to mask the sound with his skill.

What’s stranger, though, was Lackey’s reaction.

Before the Mage whispered in his ear, Lackey moved its head fitfully, trying to bite the Mage’s hand; but, after the whispers began, the skeleton fell silent. It was so quiet I almost wondered if it had fallen asleep–after all, it stopped moving as well.

Pleased with the reaction, Seo Dawon let go of its collar. However, despite being released, Lackey did not rush to hug me and instead glared at the Mage for a long while.

Its emotions ran deeper than usual. If before it wanted to bite at Seo Dawon mindlessly, now… I guess it exhibited feelings of deep resentment?

“You…What did you say to Lackey?” Unable to be a mere spectator, I poked the Mage in the side; he simply shrugged his shoulders and ignored the skeleton’s gaze.

And Lackey…

[Clack Clack……]

[Yes. I love this.]

The skeleton spoke like a broken toy. After Seo Dawon touched the toy earlier, the choker seemed to repeat those words again and again.

Surprisingly, though, when Seo Dawon moved to touch it again, Lackey didn’t rebel. It stayed docile without attempting to snap its teeth at the offending fingers and sighed, as if it had given up.

I asked the Mage, “So, you really did say something?”

“Mhmm, I said, ‘Let’s be friends from now on.'”

“Do you think I’m stupid?”

In lieu of answering, Seo Dawon flashed me a cheeky smile. Then, he lifted the skeleton and placed it on his shoulder; in the same movement, he pressed me down onto the mattress and covered me with a blanket.

It seemed like he would depart soon. Surprised at the sudden movement, I asked, “You’re leaving already? Wait–Seo Dawon! You’re really not telling me anything?”

“You didn’t tell me what was in my [Current Mood] either.”

“It’s just! This and that are different…”

He cut off my words with a short kiss on the lips. Seo Dawon smiled apologetically and told me to, “Sleep.”

I only realized what that smile meant when I opened my eyes the next morning. The Mage had bounced off after using his [Sleep] skill on me.

* * *

“Bullshit–my domination over them somehow increased? They’re totally still doing as they please! What the hell is different from before…?” Huffing and puffing, I walked slowly and with purpose at the rehabilitation center. I was prescribed 1 hour of low-intensity exercise per day; after learning that no one else was around, I couldn’t resist my frustration, and all my irritation came spilling out of me.

“Do you know how confused and bewildered I was after I woke up…? Nnngh…!”

“Lee-kyung-nim!!”

However, my tantrum couldn’t last much longer than a minute because Kim Sangyoon returned with a water bottle.

Actually, I wasn’t alone when I opened my eyes this morning. Kim Sangyoon said that he had received a call from the Mage right after he woke up; he received a ‘request’ to take care of me until evening.

“Please drink some water before you continue.”

“Yeah… Thanks.”

“Haha. You need to hydrate yourself in between workout sessions.” Far from being bothered, Kim Sangyoon took care of me with vigor; he even strived to support me when I went to the bathroom, assisting me without any grumbling.

However, Kim Sangyoon’s kind, gentle attitude didn’t assuage my mood. I sighed and took another sip of water as the Warrior recommended.

“Have you…heard from Seo Dawon?”

“What? Should I call him right now?”

“Don’t…”

I’m sure he’d come if I were to call him, but it was obvious that my efforts would be in vain. I could clearly pinpoint his pattern; Seo Dawon would apologize and still act the same way even after I pressed him.

Domination, Sweet Submission… That’s all talk–nothing had changed fundamentally. I frowned and furrowed my eyebrows, although I immediately tried to relax my expression, conscious of Kim Sangyoon’s attention.

Kim Sangyoon wasn’t devoid of sense either; he kept sending me sidelong glances. He seemed like he had something to say, but wouldn’t voice his opinion until after I finished exercising.

As soon as I dismounted the elliptical machine, he brought me a towel and began making friendly small talk. “Lee-kyung-nim.”

“Yes?”

“By the way, where and how did you get hurt this time…? Actually, I was surprised to hear, all of a sudden, that you were admitted into the hospital.”

“Ah…”

So, the Mage explained nothing to Kim Sangyoon either?

I wondered if the Mage did that on purpose, but I decided to just be open with the Warrior anyway. I thought this was another one of his ‘I didn’t feel the need to explain, so I didn’t’ moments. Kim Sangyoon is familiar with Koo Hui-seo anyway.

“So… I was caught up in Koo Hui-seo’s business.”

“Aha…”

It was then–as soon as I was about to reveal further details, my cell phone rang. Kim Sangyoon quickly ran and brought back my cellphone which I had left on the elliptical. “The call’s area code is revealed…”

I hesitated at the unfamiliar area code, but even though I thought it might be spam, I still answered the phone. “Hello?”

–Choi Lee-kyung-ssi?

My body turned rigid as soon as I heard the voice over the speaker. It was Bae Jaemin.

–This is Choi Lee-kyung-ssi’s cell phone, right?

“…Yes, that’s right. Who is this?” However, my voice came out calmly, masking the nervousness I felt. I was emboldened by the feeling of crisis; I felt like I shouldn’t show my bewilderment.

I pretended to not recognize him. Simultaneously, I raised my index fingers to my lips, signaling to the Warrior to be quiet. Kim Sangyoon's expression also became grave; with a worried expression, he closed his mouth and began to concentrate on the voice that leaked from the speaker.

Then, Bae Jaemin answered after a brief silence.

–It's Bae Jaemin. We've met before, remember?

"…Ah, yes… Is something the matter?"

–There's something I'd like to ask you.

TL: Oh my gosh, Kim Sangyoon is such a little puppy. RIP Lee-kyung. Seo Dawon will probably keep you in the loop, but he's also probably still a little upset about being cockblocked…and not knowing what was in his "current mood," when you promised to tell him >.<

Lee-kyung is so easily flustered, though. It's adorable.

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Chapter 266

Chapter 266

"…What is it?"

–I heard you came to Jeju Island.

From then on, I couldn't answer calmly. Both he and I knew what had happened during my jaunt over to Jeju Island. Bae Jaemin did not rush me even though I was struck momentarily speechless.

–What I'm curious about… I assume that Lee-kyung-ssi can guess at my meaning?

"……"

–Let's meet tomorrow and have a conversation.

He acted as if he was going to hang up the phone. I tried to answer him calmly–I had to buy time somehow. "Tomorrow… is a little too soon…"

–Really? I thought Lee-kyung-ssi would ask to meet today."

"……"

–I guess you don't find the Jeju story all that interesting.

However, this didn't work on the Priest.

–Well, it’s fine if you’re not interested. I just thought of Lee-kyung-ssi and wanted to give him an opportunity…

“……”

–You know that there are a lot of people interested in this incident, right?

It was an obvious threat.

“…I understand. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

–Very well.

I answered after a deliberate pause, trying not to show my anxiety. Even though I docilely accepted the Priest’s offer, I had no idea how much he knew.

After hanging up, I racked my brain for a while, but could only come up with one conclusion.

‘If he knew everything, he wouldn’t be able to call me so leisurely.’

He probably has no idea about my connection with [Red Lotus].

If he had uncovered that I had contacted the deposed guild, he would have stormed into the hospital earlier. However, it was clear that, by mentioning [Jeju Island], he was inquiring about Park Hoseok’s death rather than his secret with [Red Lotus].

‘He must not have thought about the guild yet, but he must think I’m involved in some way with Park Hoseok’s death?’

Through this line of reasoning, I could figure out Bae Jaemin’s motive and attitude.

He seemed to regard me as an intermediary to a key figure–just like the last time at the hospital ward. Furthermore, since it’s been a while, Bae Jaemin would probably have noticed that there’s someone else pulling the strings from behind me…

‘As expected, he’s suspecting Koo Hui-seo…’ That was the only conclusion I could draw.

When I went to Jeju island, the documents stated that I was acting on behalf of Koo Hui-seo. Plus, Bae Jaemin had seen me on the night that the ex-chimera was released.

With this, I could guess at the Priest’s thoughts.

‘He thinks Koo Hui-seo’s involved with Park Hoseok’s death.’

The reason why he believed Koo Hui-seo intervened in this situation was probably because…

* * *

“That’s certainly…strange.” Ryu Hyerin murmured as she turned over pages in Park Hoseok’s case file one by one. These were documents that Bae Jaemin had received directly from Moon Sung-Hak, chairman of the User Association, through ‘a deal of sorts.’

And, because of these documents, Ryu Hyerin was summoned into the [HaHae] office in the middle of the night.

Legs crossed, Bae Jaemin spoke in a concerned voice, “Did you see the results of the skill evaluation?”

“Yeah, I’m seeing it.”

“Does that even make sense?”

“……”

“What do you think? How much do you think…this bastard knows?”

Ryu Hyerin waited until Bae Jaemin calmed down.

He was always on the thinner side, but recently the man could hardly eat or fall asleep, making his face gaunt.

Ever since Moon Issak mentioned Beatrice, Bae Jaemin had carefully poured over the details of Park Hoseok's case, but he could glean nothing useful.

The official investigations surprisingly concluded that this murder was impossible unless 'Jung Garam' himself had killed Park Hoseok using his skills.

Of course, that was impossible; that meant someone else had manipulated the scene meticulously. Their problem, though, was that they still had no idea who the manipulator was.

Any User who had the ability to be considered a suspect was cleared through their alibi; those who couldn't be cleared by their alibi were people who joined hands in the 'Tower of Command' incident.

In other words… There may be a traitor.

Therefore, Bae Jaemin spent several weeks feeling like everything was about to be revealed or he'd be assassinated by someone. He had barely been suppressing that emotional weight while going about his official business, but… it seems he'd lost his mind after reading the documents today.

Because of that, he had contacted Ryu Hyerin at dawn–the time where most others were asleep and there were fewer straying eyes–and calmed himself down using her skills.

Then, after using her skill, Ryu Hyerin took a look at the data while sitting in the Priest's usual seat. Bae Jaemin looked at her with an expressionless face and bit his lips.

"It seems like this person knows of your relationship with Jung Garam during your [Red Lotus] days," she said.

"……"

Ryu Hyerin was far from optimistic about the situation, but she spoke cautiously, trying to soothe the overly sensitive Priest. Inwardly, she agreed with the Priest's conclusion and suspected a traitor, but she did not outwardly voice that opinion.

Bae Jaemin noticed her consideration and took giant breaths. When she finally saw him simmer down, she continued, "This'll be easy to uncover. We just need to find whoever brought up the topic of [Beatrice] to Moon Issak."

"Do you think Moon Issak will cooperate and tell us? Even now, although I've stated this is personal business, he's gently trying to scratch away at these hidden matters…"

"We can look through all the people Moon Issak met with since the Park Hoseok incident. It won't take long."

Only then did Bae Jaemin plop down into his seat. He slowly swept away his bangs, as if he could finally relax, then bowed his head. "If there was a traitor…"

"Yeah."

"Who would have betrayed us? We've already made an [Oath]."

The effect of the [Oath] was so powerful that not even Bae Jaemin could escape certain death.

When they had decided, a few years ago, to bring down [Red Lotus], maintaining secrecy was par for the course; everyone who participated in this plan had to agree to the [Oath]. With such strong shackles around them, neither hide nor hair of the truth had been revealed to the world at large.

However, Ryu Hyerin had already guessed who was the most likely traitor. From the moment betrayal had entered the realm of possibility, she had thought no one else matched the description. "It'd be Koo Kyungman, of course."

“What?”

“…He may not have revealed it willingly.”

Before Koo Kyungman had vanished into thin air, he was [Red Dragon]’s former guildmaster.

Bae Jaemin fell into deep thought, “Then… Do you think Koo Hui-seo crafted this whole thing?”

“Who knows. I can’t be sure, but… He’s the most suspicious person at the moment.”

The Priest didn’t respond, but he inwardly agreed.

Actually, he was startled to hear that Koo Kyungman was missing, but he also felt refreshed, as if a rotten tooth had been pulled out.

Even when he was on the same side as Koo Kyungman, that man was a disgusting human being who couldn’t be trusted. The Priest felt awkward, but there was no other person he could rely on for this matter. Of course, that man had grabbed at Bae Jaemin’s ankle several times in his great greed, even after they had achieved their shared goal. That’s why he pretended ignorance when the man had fallen to Koo Hui-seo.

It wasn’t uncommon for sibling rivalry–dog fights over status or power–to end in murder. Therefore, he was able to stay a spectator, as if he were watching from across the river bank, in this sudden change in the guildmaster seat. He held no particular stake in this matter–he was only interested to see whether Koo Kyungman lived or died.

However, he recognized his shortcomings when he heard Ryu Hyerin’s theory. [1] He had overlooked the possibility of Koo Hui-seo torturing or forcing the information one way or another out of his brother after capturing him.

Maybe Koo Hui-seo didn’t intend to reveal this information either. At best, he probably intended to torture the location of a slush fund out of his

brother. Then, unable to endure the pain, perhaps Koo Kyungman had confessed an unmentionable secret…

Although this was something conjured by Bae Jaemin's imagination, this scenario was so airtight, that he couldn't find an easy hole to poke into this. Ryu Hyerin, while looking at the Priest's changing expression, said, "Call Jisoo Unni."

"….."

"Let's gather soon."

Bae Jaemin couldn't easily authorize that decision even after hearing Ryu Hyerin's recommendation.

Lim Jisoo was a legendary Mage who had manufactured the [Oath]; the co-conspirators who shared that [Oath] often exchanged information and insisted, amongst each other, that they should help if someone should fall into trouble.

However, it was clear that Lim Jisoo would prove troublesome and argue since she had stayed still and simply allowed Koo Kyungman's death.

It would be one thing if she were to just interrogate him, but Lim Jisoo always tried to find a scapegoat amongst the group and lord her presence over them. He may have to be dragged around by her until he offered her one of his secrets.

However, Ryu Hyerin, who had guessed the reason for his hesitation, grabbed the Priest's hand. "Just call them for now. I'll step up as one of the [Oath-takers]."

"As a representative of [Opera]?"

"……Yeah."

Bae Jaemin looked at Ryu Hyerin with eyes widened from surprise. He knew how much she hated the name [Opera].

Become a Patron!

TL: Bae Jaemin and Ryu Hyering again O.O

Footnotes

1. is a common phrase for ‘overlooking something’ or ‘feeling regret for something you didn’t recognize’ Just an FYI for those that MTL, bc the mtl doesn’t catch this phrase

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Chapter 267

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Ryu Hyerin was a rare case–she had awoken as a User when she was just under 10 years old. She had even chosen to join the [Priest] class. At an early age, she stood out amongst the other awakened population.

As she was someone recognized for her outstanding talent and highly-demanded class, many large guilds made sweet propositions to Ryu Hyerin's parents. Of those guilds, [Opera] had offered to pay the largest amount.

At that time, Minor Users were restricted from entering the dungeon for more than 80 hours a month. Beyond that, there was no other protection against potential mental and physical damage.

Less than a year after awakening, Ryu Hyerin had to live in the dormitory of a large-scale guild instead of with her parents. By the age of 12, she was being trained to enter and clear dungeons.

Monsters were scary, for sure, but an elementary school-aged child also had to deal with Users who responded sensitively to minor mistakes–after all, a misstep could result in a terrible, permanent injury.

Priests were precious and rare, both back then and now, so there was no guild (even today) that placed two Priests in a single team.

The guild, after paying an exorbitant scouting fee to her parents, made her work the full 80 hours a month to recoup their money. Whenever Ryu

Hyerin went inside the dungeons with her assigned guild, they'd speak loudly enough for her to overhear:

'*There's no such thing as a 'child' in a dungeon–no excuses. Does she expect us to clean up after her?*'

'*If you make a mistake, we're all doomed.*'

'*Does she think crying will solve anything?*'

They would often compare her to older and more experienced Priests as well.

'*Just what kind of raid are we supposed to be conducting with a kid like that…?*'

'*Stop hesitating! Why are you standing there, staring blankly!*'

'*It's not Jihye noona today? It's her? Haah, this is driving me insane…*'

Ryu Hyerin stopped shedding tears easily after realizing that, no matter how much she cried, nothing would change. She'd spare her tears until after the dungeon raid finished and her confiscated phone was returned to her–at that point, she'd call her parents.

'*Mom, can't I go home?*'

'*It's too scary here; it's difficult…*'

Ryu Hyerin's parents always answered their daughter's calls.

‘Our daughter, you’re having many difficulties, right?’

‘Hyerin-ie is performing amazingly! Even the guildmaster-nim was praising you. You have no idea how high our expectations are for you.’

‘You should try to smile and greet your teammates first. If you act friendly, the Unnis and Oppas will open up and be nice to you.’

However, they would never call first. They wouldn’t even visit.

It wasn’t until much later on that she found out [Opera] had limited her parent’s right to visit in the contract. They had stated it would be a hindrance to her training.

However, visitation wasn’t completely prohibited–they just didn’t come.

Ryu Hyerin gradually stopped calling her parents; nothing would change even if she called. However, she still followed her parent’s advice and approached the other guild members with a forced smile. That smile, though, made her more servile.

‘Hyerin-ah, can’t you read what’s written here?’

‘What? Why?’

‘Honestly, it clearly says ‘Open’[1] *here, but you clearly don’t understand a thing…’*

‘Wow–really?’

‘She doesn’t know things like that because she’s an idiot.’

‘Aiya~ Pretty faces never need to study.’

Even if she missed school for several days, no one looked for her. Ryu Hyerin had to attend school for another, extended year due to lack of attendance.

She had difficulty with English words and had little understanding of hanja characters as well. Ryu Hyerin couldn't read the word 'Open' on the lid of the newly packaged potion, so she asked her team leader to deal with it. She was publically humiliated until her face flushed red.

A middle-aged male User told Hyerin, 'You don't have to study because you're pretty,' and creepily patted her on the shoulder. She suffered from insomnia as she had flashbacks from the vivid memory of his touch. From that day on, she studied even if her sleep time was reduced. However, even afterwards, the team members would sling derogatory slurs at her, calling her 'bird brain' or 'vapid idiot'.

'I'd like to change teams…'

'We'll be going into our third quarter reshuffle soon, so hang in there until then.'

Furthermore, when she expressed her desire to change teams to Kim Sooyoung, the guildmaster of Opera, she was told that she had to remain in the same team with only two Users changed during the third quarter reshuffle.

When she contacted an agent to uncover the contract's termination clause, the guild master threatened her with an enormous cancellation fee. However, even at that age, Ryu Hyerin could calculate she could pay back that amount in 10 years.

But…

‘Hyerin-ah. They’re the people that raised you. Is this how you repay the grace they’ve given you until now…?’

‘Is this puberty? Do you think you’re all grown up now?’

The guildmaster shackled her ankles again by bringing up her parents and using them as collateral.

The agent she had been in contact with had only brought her a slave contract–not a proper one–and simply made suspicious promises to Ryu Hyerin, who was now a highschool student. He claimed that someone within the User’s Association wanted to meet with her alone.

After all her hopes were dashed, her situation worsened after returning to her original team. The guild leader did not properly provide consumables like potions to the young Priest and began to bully her by asking her to rewrite her reports despite the fact that she had attached all of the necessary receipts.

Ryu Hyerin had decided to wait until she was able to sign her own contract–when she was finally an adult. Then…she was able to meet Seo Dawon for the first time at the age of 19.

‘One billion won just to support a priest? Did I hear you wrong?’

‘She’s the best Priest in our guild.’

‘Ahh… Is Teacher Kim Sooyoung coming to our guild personally?’

‘No, of course not… What kind of nonsense is that…?’

‘The best Priest in Opera…isn’t that you?’

‘Oh my! That’s… Ahahaha, what a joke!’

‘Perhaps it’d make sense if Teacher Kim Sooyoung is making personal visits to your guild, but, otherwise, one billion won is too much.’

‘Geez… Even if you butter me up like that, I…’

‘Then what about an extension of the contract? I’ll need to save some face as well. If I were to pay a Priest one billion won for 6 months, I’m sure Olim… I’m sure my deputy guildmaster would kill me.’

‘Mm, then…’

Kim Sooyoung had notified some guilds, aiming to temporarily lease Ryu Hyerin out like a mercenary. Ryu Hyerin had nothing to say–not only was this part of her job, but she was akin to a slave. She had no authority to sway this decision.

And, today, she had heard that the guildmaster of the guild she was rented to had come to stamp the contract.

As she stood in front of the guildmaster’s office, she felt like she was about to be dragged away. However, just before she entered, she had overheard a man with a pleasant voice roasting Kim Sooyoung.

Kim Sooyoung was someone crazy about money–a miser–so, she must have demanded a crazy amount. 1 billion won for a 6-month dispatch. It was a ridiculous amount, considering she had only earned half that amount during her whole life.

However, the atmosphere was quite strange.

Contrary to her usual machinations, Kim Sooyoung didn’t try to needle at the man, and rather the man was now dominating the conversation over the ridiculous contract.

The man wanted to extend the lease to two years, and, surprisingly, the guildmaster was considering it. Even now, Ryu Hyerin wondered if the person in there was really her guildmaster. The voice's tone sounded higher than usual, but it should still be Kim Sooyoung…

However, as she stood there contemplating, her nose right in front of the door, the door opened suddenly and scarily. Startled, she retreated a few hurried steps. "Ah…!"

"Ryu Hyerin-ssi?" The person who opened the door was taller than Ryu Hyerin.

She looked up from his chest, eyes sliding up to his face. She took another half-step backwards, even more startled than when the door opened.

When Ryu Hyerin locked gazes with the man, she understood why Kim Sooyoung was off-beat. She realized rather belatedly that her guildmaster couldn't tear her eyes off the man to even mock Ryu Hyerin.

She took another step back, lest she be the target of ridicule. Ryu Hyerin inadvertently swept her hair behind her ear and answered the man's question a bit belatedly. "…Yes, that's me."

"I'm Seo Dawon from Red Lotus. I look forward to working with you in the future." The man smiled, but his expression showed very little emotion– a very professional, business-like attitude.

She wondered if the reason for her flushed cheeks or her shyly lowered eyes was because she had seen, for the first time, a man close to her age. However, she tried to suppress those emotions and grabbed the man's outstretched hand. For some reason, she thought his hand would be cold, but it was surprisingly warm.

And…

"Please take care of me…"

Regretfully, his hand released her's far too soon.

It was truly the first time she ever felt that way.

Become a Patron!

TL: Way back in time! To when Dawon and Hyerin first met. This mini-arc, imo, is going to answer a lot of questions.

Also, User Society sucks!!!

Footnotes

1. Written in English in the original

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Chapter 268

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The man named Seo Dawon had incredible skill. He finally coerced Kim Sooyoung to agree to extend Ryu Hyerin's lease to two years.

Furthermore, the reason why Ryu Hyerin thought this man was incredible was due to his ability to conclude negotiations without riling Kim Sooyoung and maintain a pleasant atmosphere. And, while wrapping things up in that manner, Seo Dawon didn't act servile either.

At the time, the [Red Lotus] guild had the reputation as a place where 'young crazies' gathered and ran wild–daredevils. [1] Seo Dawon was simply the handsome guildmaster, no more no less.

In short, it meant that his guild was far different from large-scale guilds like [Opera], where many Priests gathered to try and establish themselves in User society. Ryu Hyerin's attempts to find an agent and transfer jobs were stalled because there weren't many guilds willing to put their lives on the line to go against Kim Sooyoung's will.

However, Seo Dawon was confident without needing to showcase his superiority nor did he need to bow down to Kim Sooyoung.

'So, someone like that exists, huh?'

Ryu Hyerin felt shocked yet refreshed.

"I'll see you in our guild office from next week onwards."

"Ah, yes… Ah! H-Have a good day."

“Yes. Of course.” With negotiations now finished, Seo Dawon left the [Opera] guildmaster’s office with Ryu Hyerin, walking side by side as they navigated the building’s hallways. When they arrived at the entrance, he gave a simple greeting and walked away without looking backwards.

His straight back, walking away, had been long-imprinted into Ryu Hyerin’s mind. For the first time, she found it hard to sleep, not because of dread for her future, but because of anticipation.

* * *

The first day of the lease:

She headed to the [Red Lotus] office, wearing a new beige robe she had bought and chosen with great care.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Kim Olim. You’re Ryu Hyerin, right?”

“Ah, yes…”

“Is she that healer that’s supposed to come here?”

“…Woo Ragi, you sound so impetuous by speaking informally to a stranger you just met. Also, don’t roll around on the sofa.”

However, her excited and hopeful heart sank–like a balloon that had just popped–when she arrived. Seo Dawon, who she had been looking forward to seeing again, was away for work, and the recently introduced deputy guildmaster, the incredible beauty named Kim Olim, was the one to welcome her instead.

Kim Olim was an impressive woman with a slender physique and chilly gaze. Moreover, she had a unique atmosphere that immediately reminded Ryu Hyerin of Seo Dawon.

At that time, Ryu Hyerin felt a deep sense of defeat as she compared herself to Kim Olim, who had a body that befitted a knight, because she considered herself gangly and unsightly. Her standing posture, energy, eyes,

gait, and idle behavior… Kim Olim moved with purpose. The woman showcased a dignity that Ryu Hyerin couldn't hope to achieve.

'I feel like a fool…'

After seeing Kim Olim, the new robe Ryu Hyerin bought felt somewhat shameful and embarrassing. Why did she come here wearing something like this? What an idiot…

Kim Olim must have thought Ryu Hyerin's darkening expression–from self-loathing–arose from anxiety; the deputy guildmaster made her a cup of warm cocoa. However, Ryu Hyerin bowed to her without even taking a sip first.

After an hour of this awkward atmosphere flew by, the door to the headquarters finally opened, and Seo Dawon walked in. Ryu Hyerin jumped out of her seat inadvertently. He adopted a faint smile as soon as his eyes met hers and soon approached her. "Ah, you've come."

"Ah… Hello." Ryu Hyerin bowed her head in a hurry, conscious of her surroundings after her unsteady greeting. She then grabbed at her stiff, new robes for no reason. Seo Dawon stared at Ryu Hyerin for a moment before asking her in a nonchalant tone, "Did you just buy that robe?"

"Ah…yes. Because… I'll be in a new place starting today…"

"That's nice."

That was all the Mage said, but Ryu Hyerin was simply glad he recognized that she had just bought it. She followed the guildmaster's footsteps; the man (Woo Ragi), who had been lounging on the sofa all this while, glanced at her. That was the day she first met the [Red Lotus] guild.

Later, Ryu Hyerin went to raid a dungeon with the guild. She worked incredibly hard to be recognized by the mage.

The intensity and the build-up of fatigue were completely different in [Red Lotus] as it was in [Opera]. She felt that the raid went much easier

with [Red Lotus] than with the guild she had been previously toiling away and working with for the past several years. Of course, physically, her guild may be unparalleled, but she received no stress from the Red Lotus team members and felt relieved.

And, unlike [Opera], they chose to raid the dungeon with a teamwork and speed-based strategy; due to those tactics, Ryu Hyerin was able to experience the fun of a raid for once.

In addition to growing professionally, at a tremendous speed, she studied various things according to Seo Dawon's advice and learned how to be efficient in activating various high-level skills. She was able to simultaneously cast more and more spells.

In her eyes, Seo Dawon was a genius. Such a man started to acknowledge her abilities.

"I've said you're a genius."

"Me? I don't…really know about that."

"You get the idea immediately–you understand instructions–after only one explanation. A talent like yours is rare."

"Really…? But I… I've never heard anything like this except from the guildmaster. In Opera, my nickname is idiot. Haha…"

"……"

When someone she liked gave her a compliment–something that had never happened before–she felt overwhelmed and habitually denied him.

Just then, Seo Dawon said something she'd never forget for the rest of her life. "Why else would Kim Sooyoung be jealous of you?"

"…What?"

"You'll soon become the most famous and talented Priest in [Opera], after pushing Kim Sooyoung to the side."

"……"

"Hasn't everything I said come true?"

Ryu Hyerin stared at him vacantly for a while before biting her lips to stop her tears. Seo Dawon turned a blind eye to her distorted expression, as always.

That day, while following behind the Mage, she thought something. She would be willing to risk her life for this man if he would just request that from her. No–if this man wanted her life, she'd happily give it up for him. She wanted to convey her feelings to him.

Ryu Hyerin loved Seo Dawon. She loved him blindly–she could see nothing else other than that. The first person she fell in love with was so perfect; no one else caught her eye.

Even so, she couldn't confess. In her eyes, he held such an overpowering position; she felt small, shirking into herself, whenever she found herself standing before him.

In addition, the Mage treated her like an adored younger sister, yet he never talked to her about personal matters. He merely praised her generously when she produced correspondingly incredible results. Ryu Hyerin had never heard a compliment from him about her appearance as opposed to the reams of compliments coming her way from the exhausting and low-class men around her. This knife-like sharp line–this wall–that couldn't be crossed pained her.

Seo Dawon was friendly, but he wasn't particularly friendly to her. She received the kindness that he may show to other colleagues; in his private domain, there were always other women by his side.

Seo Dawon dated so many people that it almost alarmed her; still, he was able to organize his private life without much difficulty. He never met several people at once, but the length of time he dated each woman was very short. For all the consuming feelings she felt for Seo Dawon, Ryu

Hyerin knew that she was simply just one more person that adored the Mage.

So, she didn't confess. Rather, it would be more accurate to say she couldn't confess.

"You're on the front page again, Seo Dawon. I've been getting calls from advertisers all morning. How are you going to fix this?"

"Is it [Korea Days] again?"

"You have an ex-girlfriend in their editorial department, right? I remember when they stubbornly kept putting guildmaster-nim on the front page…"

"Is it dating rumors again…? Sigh… At least the picture looks good this time. They managed to get a picture of the three-piece suit and a good expression… Last time it was such a pity that guildmaster-nim's national treasure-like face wasn't shown because of the cap."

"Is this all you can say in this situation? When he's about to lose all these commercial opportunities? You dumbass?"

"Has Jung Garam-kun done his morning stretches? You must live a leisurely life if you have the luxury to read the morning paper."

"I'm really going to kill you."

It was an ordinary morning.

Now, [Red Lotus] had grown and increased its regular member count; the guild was becoming more and more famous as it succeeded in various main scenario quests with only a few elite members. In addition, the public's interest in Seo Dawon, [Red Lotus]'s face, had also grown.

The issue, though, was that Seo Dawon's public image had been gradually deteriorating as he'd been seen with so many women. He refused to explain himself to sponsorship companies despite the incoming advertising contracts, stating that one's private life should stay private, but

there was no way to stop journalists from taking photos and selling gossip about his life.

The Mage had never commented on the pictures taken of him, so articles always popped up, contemplating the minute details of his life. Ryu Hyerin was worried that the rumors were gradually becoming vulgar. She was upset, and she wanted to protect him even though she knew it sounded presumptuous. To be honest…she wanted him to stop changing the woman on his arm and settle down with herself.

Ryu Hyerin knew that the Mage did not put much meaning on girlfriends or love. If their hearts and momentary excitement coincided, he and the girl would decide to date; if their hearts cooled, he'd cleanly leave. No prominent or amazing woman could hold his attention for more than a few months.

So, Ryu Hyerin chose to remain by his side as a competent colleague and not a girlfriend in order to stay in his life for a long while. Of course, she didn't expect him to truly believe that she was being friendly with no ulterior motives–after all, she had shown her interest in him from the very beginning, but…she never confessed. She brazenly made up her mind.

At the same time, Ryu Hyerin began to strategically follow Kim Olim. Startlingly, Kim Olim held no deeper personal feelings for Seo Dawon; because of that, she learned that the knight had fully entrenched herself as a close aide to the Mage and built up trust throughout the years.

Ryu Hyerin wanted the knight's position, so she treated Seo Dawon like a woe-begotten first love she had decided to move on from. She had settled into the position of a cute little sister who no longer had any feelings left for the man. And, she tried to subtly dig into and settle her position with his close friends.

Kim Olim, who originally seemed like she had no gaps, couldn't bear to see someone vulnerable before her eyes; Ryu Hyerin had to merely confess her past to garner the paladin's attention. With Woo Ragi, she grew closer to him, little by little, as she took care of the tasks he found bothersome.

On her days off, she built rapport with Jo Chanyoung by volunteering to help abandoned animals with him; she became friends with Jung Garam by using rough words and putting up an unpretentious front.

Choi Kyung-sik began to like her just because she took his side a few times in front of the Mage. And Bang Eunji… Strangely enough, that girl was obedient to her from the very first meeting, so Ryu Hyerin didn't mind her all that much.

When Seo Dawon saw her so fired up and energetic about socializing, he would occasionally look at her with an incomprehensible gleam in his eyes, but he accepted her actions with no particular signs of opposition.

However, though her efforts have made her one of Seo Dawon's people, it didn't really fulfill her true desires. As time passed, her feelings festered. Then, at one point, resentment towards the Mage began to grow.

Why didn't he love her?

Thanks to the self-esteem that Seo Dawon had nurtured within her, she could receive others' respect without laughing and deflecting. After imitating Kim Olim, she embodied the paladin's movements, allowing her to create an air of elegance from the simple act of walking. She learned how to choose the right makeup and clothes for her face and body. She became known as a talented Priest; her treatment within [Opera] had been changing day by day.

However, Seo Dawon became more and more distant from Ryu Hyerin. He was willing to listen to the complaints and drivel from women who were so much worse than her, excuse himself from their short break times to go and meet them, and be willingly dragged out while acting like an accessory on their arms.

She couldn't understand. She felt, as she silently observed the Mage, that he had a horrible eye for women.

No matter how much she thought about it, she was the only person who could fully accept him.

And yet, he denied that blatant fact. It clearly showed in how he spent every free moment away from her…even though she desperately craved his presence every day.

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TL: Get ready for some…interesting….ideas about love.

Footnotes

1. is a metaphorical way to describe those that are wild, immature, and fearless. Literally, it means those that run naked through a thunderstorm.

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Chapter 269

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Then, one day:

Ryu Hyerin was about to wait in Seo Dawon's office as usual. But, just as she was about to grab the doorknob, someone called out to her from behind.

"Hyerin-ssi."

"…Yes?"

It was Bae Jaemin. He called out to her and, as if he was a little embarrassed, hesitated for a moment.

Ryu Hyerin had no interest in Bae Jaemin, but, at that time, she was obsessed with becoming close with everyone in [Red Lotus]. Thus, she couldn't ignore him. Eventually, she turned around and approached the Priest, leaving behind the door she was about to open. "What is it?"

"…I saw, earlier, that guildmaster-nim was speaking with a client…"

"What?"

"I thought it'd be best if you go in later." Bae Jaemin looked awkward as he spoke.

Ryu Hyerin was about to answer him but thought better and turned around. Before Bae Jaemin could stop her, she strode forth and turned the

doorknob to the office.

The handle rattled and turned; through the gap of the open door, she could see Seo Dawon sitting at his desk. And a woman sitting on his thighs…

"……"

"O-Oh my god! Excuse me… Hold on a second? Hey, get off..!"

Their posture seemed to imply that they had been kissing enthusiastically until just this moment. The woman blushed, embarrassed, and pushed Seo Dawon's chest away.

Only Seo Dawon remained calm. He gave Ryu Hyerin a wink, told her to close the door behind her on the way out, and gently grabbed his girlfriend's weakening arms with an indifferent expression.

Seo Dawon's new girlfriend glared at him with a dissatisfied face. "So embarrassing, seriously… That's why I said I hate this!"

She obviously lowered her voice so that no one else but her companion could hear, but Ryu Hyerin had clearly heard it all. Seo Dawon began to soothe his girlfriend with a low laugh, "I forgot to lock the door."

"That's the problem you lunatic… How many times do I have to remind you, consider the time and place…!" With that said, the woman suddenly felt a gaze and turned around towards Ryu Hyerin.

Ryu Hyerin couldn't tell what expression she was making right now, but the woman, who had looked embarrassed and ashamed, suddenly frowned, the downturn of her lips laden with strange emotions.

The woman, who looked at Ryu Hyerin with a questioning yet uncomfortable gaze, turned her eyes back towards her boyfriend again. And Seo Dawon…

"Hyerin-ah, if you have something to say, come back later. I'm going to take my work outside for a while."

"……" He softly set his girlfriend back on the ground. After organizing her disheveled clothes and wiping her smudged lips with a tissue, he looked at the Priest, silently 'Do you have anything else left to say?' with his eyes.

Only then did Ryu Hyerin realize that Seo Dawon had no feelings for her. That is to say, she finally calculated that he had not treated her kindly because he had an interest in her as a woman.

Seeing Ryu Hyerin's expression, Seo Dawon's girlfriend's face became slowly shuttered; they passed the Priest and left the office. The mage walked behind his girlfriend; she could hear the couple talk to each other at the end of the hallway, where the elevator was located.

"By the way, who was that woman?"

"Our team's Priest."

"Did you go out with her too?"

"I've always said you should be a novelist instead of a Warrior…."

"Aghh come on. Are you gonna evade with a joke?"

"You said something laughable, though."

With the ding of the elevator arriving, the conversation cut off there. However, Ryu Hyerin was drowning in humiliation and could not move.

At that moment, Bae Jaemin came to her side. "Hyerin-ssi. Um, if you perhaps have the time…"

"……"

"Would you like to go with me to a cafe?"

Ryu Hyerin couldn't control her surging emotions and glared at Bae Jaemin.

Bae Jaemin noted, from her resentful eyes, that his words must not have been needed. “Well… If you would rather not, you don’t have to come with me…”

Bae Jaemin retreated a bit lamely; Ryu Hyerin closed her eyes for a while before opening them again. Then, she replied to the lingering man, “Let’s go. It just so happens that I’m feeling a little restless.”

* * *

When Bae Jaemin first joined [Red Lotus], Ryu Hyerin noticed that he looked at her more than his fellow regular guild members, even after everyone had been introduced. When she looked back at him, he would always be looking away, but this happened often enough to make her certain the man was interested in her.

However, that was all. Bae Jaemin was far too quiet; her impression was that he was too bland.

A man without a presence: that was her first impression of the Priest. Although she was wary that he would approach her, Bae Jaemin would only occasionally blatantly stare at Ryu Hyerin before leaving her alone. At the very least, she was thankful for that.

“So, Bae Jaemin-ssi, you stopped me because you knew I liked Seo Dawon.”

“…Yes, well.”

They sat awkwardly in front of each other in a cafe that was about ten minute walk from the headquarters. Ryu Hyerin hastily tried to make small talk as soon as they sat down.

However, rather than being flustered, Bae Jaemin seemed to have something to say. He hesitated, enough to make her frustrated, but soon

opened his mouth as if he had steeled his resolve. “You had no idea that… There’s been talks that guildmaster-nim is getting married, right?”

“……”

“The person you saw earlier… She’s the only child of a famous career-law family.”

Ryu Hyerin was shocked but endured by clenching her fists under the table. However, Bae Jaemin didn’t stop there and continued to drop bombs. “I think everyone except for Hyerin-ssi knows. Not only me, but the other guild members… They all knew Hyerin-ssi liked guildmaster-nim, so they tried to keep the matter a secret.”

When she heard that, the faces of several guild members–including Kim Olim–flashed by, one by one, in Ryu Hyerin’s head. Even though she admitted it must have seemed amusing, she felt betrayed. Even though she hadn’t gotten friendly with them for a pure motive, her anger flared as she thought how the others may have viewed her.

‘So, I was the only one who didn’t know. And, they knew, but didn’t say a single word to me… What were they thinking, standing back, when they saw me trying to approach Seo Dawon with all my might?’

Did they laugh?

Ryu Hyerin asked Bae Jaemin in a chilly tone, “…So, why are you telling me this.”

“Because I want to help.”

“Why? You’re part of the [Red Lotus] too.”

“I don’t intend to stay here forever.”

Ryu Hyerin flinched; someone she had thought as dull stared at her, and a flash of ridicule and mockery passed through his expression. Her impression of the man had completely changed as he lowered his voice.

He continued, “I see no future for this guild. I don’t know what Ryu Hyerin-ssi will think when I say this, but…”

“…….”

“I’ve been thinking about it, but while Seo Dawon has excellent interpersonal skills, he’s not a good guild master. He considers completing the scenario his lifelong goal, but he can’t see how the others struggle with it or consider them akin to consumable items.”

Bae Jaemin’s words sounded so plausible because Ryu Hyerin knew how obsessed Seo Dawon was with clearing the scenario.

Often, Seo Dawon stayed up all night to find new ways to raid for the scenario and crafted seemingly reckless challenges. There had been many times when their lives had been in danger.

Bae Jaemin continued to talk, disregarding how she was lost in thought, “He’s selfish. Same with his romantic life…”

“……”

“If you die like this, you’ll die to achieve Seo Dawon’s dreams. Not your own. Am I being too harsh here?”

After a brief silence, Ryu Hyerin shook her head and replied, “No, I understand.”

Bae Jaemin began to speak faster, excited that she took his side. “And… I was also personally disappointed to see the way Seo Dawon-ssi took care of Ryu Hyerin-ssi.”

“……”

“Honestly, though I’ve just joined the guild, don’t you find it strange how Seo Dawon doesn’t notice your feelings? He’s very perceptive in other matters.”

“…Hah.”

“What’s the point in being mum about it? He wants to treat High Priests like Ryu Hyerin-ssi well in order to receive their heals free of charge, but he’s trying to marry a woman with a large family backing instead… As a man…this is all too obvious to me.”

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TL: Man, it’s so interesting to see how Ryu Hyerin and Bae Jaemin started out. You can definitely see the way he’s trying to sway her too (not that she needed much swaying…) He says he’s disappointed in the way that Seo Dawon took care of Ryu Hyerin, but he literally just treated her like any other person he wasn’t interested in romantically–more importantly, he treated her like a coworker. She did also try to endear herself as a younger sister archetype…and I don’t think people are out to date their younger sisters either O.O

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Chapter 270

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Ryu Hyerin did not believe or accept everything Bae Jaemin had said, but, some of his words lingered in her mind. Those words whirled around in her head even after she returned to her home and laid in bed.

‘He’s going to get married to a woman with strong family background…’

So, that woman had a respectable pedigree.

Ryu Hyerin recalled the woman’s face; come to think of it, she wasn’t very good-looking. The girlfriend could be called cute, but that was it. That shabby woman couldn’t be compared to someone like herself who often received offers to model for photoshoots daily.

However, that woman was supported by a family of legal powerhouses. It was an insurmountable gap for her; her parents sold their daughter for less than 1 billion won.

‘So unfair…’

The world was too harsh if she couldn’t attain the one thing Seo Dawon considered important.

Now, Ryu Hyerin even thought she acted like an idiot. She recalled how, not long ago, she proudly stated, in front of him, how she had finally paid back her parent's sale price with the money she earned.

'He must have found me so ridiculous.'

It was no different from boasting about her status as a woman with no family, no proper background…nothing.

She wanted to die; she told him about those matters because she wanted attention from the Mage. She was ignorant; she just wanted to hear his compliments. Instead, she just confirmed that she was a 'woman not worth dating.'

Days later, she even began to think that Seo Dawon ignored her feelings because of her impoverished background. From then on, she developed severe insomnia.

* * *

"Are you alright?"

After two weeks of being unable to sleep, Ryu Hyerin eventually faced her physical limit during a critical point in a raid. She kept exposing herself to monster attacks because, even though she was wide awake, her body couldn't move at all.

She couldn't even loudly exclaim and express her shock due to the sudden threat of imminent pain; she closed her eyes tightly. However, the pain she expected didn't arrive even after a few seconds passed; someone had supported her falling body. That person was…Seo Dawon. The mage rushed to the rear to save her.

"Ah……" Unable to endure the sudden deluge of exhaustion, her head drooped into his arms, and she fell asleep as if she had fallen unconscious.

For a few moments, just before her eyes fluttered shut, she locked gazes with Bae Jaemin, whose brows were furrowed. However, she was unable to think further.

After two days of continuous sleep, Ryu Hyerin was able to open her eyes. As soon as her eyes slit open, she saw Kim Olim standing beside her bed. The Paladin stroked her forehead with rough palms. “Hyerin-ah.”

“…I’m sorry. My body just wouldn’t listen to me, suddenly.”

“Don’t apologize. What’s wrong? You didn’t look so good.”

“It’s just… I haven’t been able to sleep much lately.” After giving a nonchalant answer, Ryu Hyerin bit her lips; perhaps she shouldn’t have said anything.

But, Kim Olim patted her awkwardly without questioning her further. “I’m sorry. I should have immediately noticed.”

“……”

Her voice sounded deeply guilty, but Ryu Hyerin felt only annoyance. In fact, as soon as the Priest opened her eyes, she only wanted Seo Dawon to be by her side, so nothing the paladin said really penetrated her ears. Her brain was full of curiosity about the Mage’s activities and whereabouts.

‘He’s probably worried for me, right?’

Physically, her condition was still dreadful because her fatigue had not been completely alleviated, but her mouth kept smiling. She thought about asking Kim Olim about the Mage but swallowed her question as she remembered Bae Jaemin’s words. Then, she closed her eyes and pretended to sleep.

As expected, Kim Olim left after carefully patting her head a few more times, leaving her some space to rest. Only then could Ryu Hyerin relax. While clapping her feet against each other, she repeatedly savored the memory of what happened just before she collapsed.

‘He came to save me…’

The feeling of his strong arms wrapping around her waist was still vividly clear. His downcast eyes, his faint frown, the monsters that rushed closer… even the dust that rose into the air from the fight…

‘I can’t give up…’

Ryu Hyerin kept tossing and turning and biting her lips. What did she need to do to possess the Mage wholly? However, unless she could reincarnate, she was far from the woman of his dreams.

At this rate, she’ll lose him forever. Anxiety and frustration enveloped her.

At that moment, the hospital room door opened quietly, and someone slipped inside. Ryu Hyerin awkwardly rose to a sitting position; her eyes narrowed when she saw that it was Bae Jaemin who was silently approaching her.

“You should have at least knocked,” she said.

“So you’re awake… Olim-noona said you were sleeping…” Bae Jaemin locked the door behind him. Though Ryu Hyerin didn’t trust the man, she lied back down again without showing outward distrust.

Even though the other perceived her reluctance, he sat beside her without hesitation. Ryu Hyerin had grown to dislike Bae Jaemin, who acted arbitrarily now that she showed him her true colors. Therefore, she thought she would ignore whatever he was going to say.

“You’re not going to ask what our guildmaster-nim is currently doing?”

However, Bae Jaemin was already aware of her inner thoughts. Ryu Hyerin, who laid with her back turned to him, fixed her posture, and stared up blatantly. Bae Jaemin swept a sticky gaze from her face down to the base of her neck before slowly continuing, “He’s with that woman.”

Almost automatically, Ryu Hyerin clenched her fists–the ones holding the blanket–tightly. “…Right now?”

“I heard it’s his girlfriend’s birthday.”

“……”

“If you developed any expectations because he saved you from the dungeons…Stop now. You already know you shouldn’t.”

“……”

“My heart aches just watching you like that…” Bae Jaemin said before reaching out to her; Ryu Hyerin bitterly pushed him away.

Slap–!

“Are you doing this on purpose? I’m not interested in you, so you’re trying to make me give up…?” She shouted.

“……”

“Did I ever tell you I wanted to know all that?”

Bae Jaemin took back his hand, completely unfazed. However, he didn’t back down.

In the end, Ryu Hyerin shed her long-held tears. Although she didn’t want to show her crying face to him, his sympathetic face made her feel so unbearably wretched.

Wiping tears off her sallow cheeks, she angrily screamed, “Just leave. I don’t need anything or anyone, so get out!”

However, Bae Jaemin did not exit the room. He looked at her with a creepy gaze, as if he were looking at an almost-caught prey. She had only seen that gleam for an instant, but it sent shivers down her spine.

Soon, though, Bae Jaemin erased the expression, grabbed her pushing hand, and pulled her towards him. While she stood awkwardly, he leaned in close and whispered into her ear, “Should I block his engagement?”

“…What?” Ryu Hyerin tried to laugh at the audacity–could he really do something like that? She froze, though, when she saw his eyes. They shined with a cruel but confident gleam, as if he knew something. She swallowed dry saliva.

“It wouldn’t be all that difficult. I’ve already figured out Seo Dawon’s personality.”

“……”

“Honestly, I believe it’s easier to fool a genius than to fool ten idiots. What do you want me to do?”

She chewed her lips, conflicted, at his whispered question.

As if he already knew the cause for her hesitation, Bae Jaemin added gently, “Well, even if it doesn’t work, Hyerin-ssi won’t be implicated.”

“……”

“After all, I’m the only one doing anything.”

“…What do you want?” Ryu Hyerin knew Bae Jaemin liked her, so she felt disgusted by this conversation and the narrowing distance between them. Despite his interest, Bae Jaemin definitely wasn’t the type of person to help her out of the pure goodness of his heart.

In lieu of answering, Bae Jaemin slowly brushed back her hair past her thin, trembling neck. When her pale, fine skin was revealed, he bowed his head to her, as if to kiss her there.

Ryu Hyerin couldn’t stand the sudden surge of disgust and tried to push Bae Jaemin away. But, before her hand could touch his shoulder, he coolly rose from his seat.

Bae Jaemin's shoulders shook with laughter–he surely knew what she had imagined. She looked up at him blankly; he stared back and giggled, "What I want is for Hyerin-ssi to…develop an eye for good men. That's it."

When she realized he was teasing her, she raged, "…Don't make me laugh. You're absolutely worse than Seo Dawon."

"Correct. But, I wouldn't make Hyerin-ssi ill."

As soon as her hands paused, Bae Jaemin had already turned around. The door to her room had opened quietly–as quiet as it was when the Priest entered her room. Just before the door closed, she heard a small voice telling her to 'Rest.'

Ryu Hyerin didn't answer.

After that night, seven days later, Seo Dawon broke up with his girlfriend…the very same girlfriend that had been embroiled in the engagement rumors.

TL: I definitely think the novel takes care to show Ryu Hyerin's sympathetic past and abhorrent nature to avert the trope of "Sad background absolves all" but to also show how entering User society as a child can warp you. Like, dang, how does one think like this about love? To think that someone doesn't love you just because of your financial background…and that's the only reason. Like, man, when the world is "might makes right," social morals get wonky. Also the way she described the ex-girlfriend/fiance reminds me of the way that people describe Lee-kyung: not "good-looking" but perhaps cute.

Total aside, but a lot of comments have been talking about being sad about Seo Dawon's previous body count. That's never been something that I've been bothered by since I also have a previous dating life as well. (Instead, I

find literally everything else about Dawon objectionable haha) I found it super interesting to know that people do care, and it’s been great to read a lot of dissenting and concurring opinions. (I just think I love reading people’s hot takes and opinions tbh)

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Chapter 271

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t.w : Thoughts of Suicide

It was hard to tell whether Bae Jaemin had intervened or if it was a matter of coincidence. Externally, the two had said the breakup was caused by a ‘difference in personality.’ The real reason for the breakup was hard to uncover since Seo Dawon was not the type to talk about his previous relationships or past girlfriends.

However, Ryu Hyerin could only guess that Bae Jaemin must have said or done something to Seo Dawon’s ex-girlfriend. She asked him about his methods, but the Priest always evaded answering her.

Afterwards, Bae Jaemin would treat her normally–calmly as always–in the [Red Lotus] office but would often come find her to dine together near her residence.

“Don’t come looking for me like this,” Ryu Hyerin snapped.

“If you don’t want to, then you don’t have to accompany me.”

Ryu Hyerin glanced at the Priest after hearing his despicable answer and sat down in front of him.

Actually, Ryu Hyerin couldn’t really understand her actions either. Bae Jaemin was a man she couldn’t trust; he held unpleasant motives–she knew

that well. But, when she met him, she felt strangely light, as if she had thrown off all her burdens.

Bae Jaemin treated her like he knew her real character (better than she knew herself). At the same time, he still liked her, despite being aware of her crazy obsession with the Mage.

'He's a real nutcase.'

Today, as always, Bae Jaemin ordered off the menu as Ryu Hyerin desired and paid for her expensive drinks and bar snacks without complaining. Of course, she knew he made a lot of money, but he never got angry when she snorted and interrupted his conversation constantly.

Similarly, he never complained when she talked about Seo Dawon as if she were drunkenly angsting. She left him no space to talk and was sarcastic to the priest…The desire to see him grow angry–at least once–grew within her as their meetings continued. "Don't you have any pride?"

"What?"

"Don't you mind being treated like this?"

"Not particularly?"

Even if she brought the matter up, Bae Jaemin would only shrug and respond nonchalantly.

Ryu Hyerin realized that insulting an opponent who wouldn't fight back–who wouldn't do anything–wouldn't be effective. Eventually, she gave up on the meaningless taunts.

And, from then on, she began cultivating a strange friendship with the Priest.

When she met with Bae Jaemin, she talked about things that she couldn't bear to voice out in the public. Bae Jaemin mostly talked about the inferiority complex he felt towards Seo Dawon and Jung Garam. At first,

Ryu Hyerin felt a bit uncomfortable, but later she sympathized with his words to some extent and responded in turn.

Since Ryu Hyerin had never talked badly about her peers, even as a child User, Bae Jaemin's vulgarity was both stimulating and enjoyable.

Above all, Ryu Hyerin was plugged into the Priest's mindset [1] since she hated Kim Olim as well. All the people around her praised the Paladin, and now Ryu Hyerin was exhausted of praising the woman, pretending to agree with those opinions, as well.

She often felt like she was being pushed to the side when she was with the Paladin. Even though their relationship was supposedly equal, she felt inferior. Like she had become the other's maid. "I hate pretending to be nice to her. Honestly, Kim Olim is as weird as Bang Eunji. Even the way she speaks…it's not like a normal person at all."

"You and I are the only sane people in that guild."

"……"

Of course, she felt uncomfortable to be tied in some way with Bae Jaemin–he kept saying 'we,' as if they were somehow similar. However, her repulsion gradually faded.

As she spent more time with the Priest, she began to think of the [Red Lotus] people with his mindset. That is to say, she dealt with them kindly on the outside but despised them on the inside. Then, when they opened up and were vulnerable to her, the joy of deceiving them pranced around in her heart.

Though…

"Hyerin-ie only has a few months left, huh?" Seo Dawon said.

"……"

“I told [Opera] I wanted to extend the lease, but they immediately refused. I heard that they emptied the deputy guildmaster position for you once you return.”

“Really? Haha…they said nothing of the sort to me…”

No matter how much she cursed at and disgraced Seo Dawon behind his back, she couldn’t remember any of her dislike and insults as soon as she was in his presence. It was as if her distaste and curses that she spouted, the day before, were a lie.

Furthermore, he had not dated anyone else since he had broken up with his previous girlfriend. Of course, he had no time to meet anyone because of their guild’s sudden explosive activity, but, whenever she saw his empty left ring finger, lingering feelings formed in her heart.

After she collapsed that fateful day in the dungeon, he treated her a little nicer. Every day, when he saw her face, he asked her how she felt. He was ignorant to the fact that she drank a lot while only nibbling at her lunch during her hangout with Bae Jaemin the previous day; the Mage was concerned, asking if she was sick.

And, the other day, he gave her a necklace he personally bought. The item supposedly alleviated insomnia; apparently, it was easier to fall asleep if you laid down while wearing the accessory.

However, the necklace didn’t work on her. She tossed and turned all night, consumed by the thought that the Mage had bought this for her.

‘…Does he really have no feelings for me? Would he really do this for a friend?’

“You’ll do well even if you leave. If you’re having any difficulties, contact me,” Seo Dawon said.

Ryu Hyerin gradually swelled when she saw the Mage’s expression; it seemed like he was really regretful that they would be parting. She

wondered if Seo Dawon wanted to say something else to her–why else would he call her out separately like this?

“I…I like oppa,” she said.

“…What?”

“I’ve liked you from the start. Always…” Eventually, she couldn’t stop herself from confessing to the Mage.

However…the moment she saw Seo Dawon’s expression, her hope shattered. His expression differed completely from the Mage’s expression in her fantasies when she used to secretly imagine what it’d be like to confess. He only seemed surprised and perhaps a little perplexed.

She had mistaken everything.

It seemed that her confession didn’t flutter his heart and was simply an embarrassing headache for him.

“I see. I had no idea.”

“……”

Seo Dawon glanced at her, contemplating how he should refuse her. Ryu Hyerin could read the atmosphere before he even outright rejected her. She wanted to block his mouth to stop him from talking any further.

However, she had to endure this humiliation without raising her hand.

“…This is an important time for the guild, so I’ll have to focus on my work,” he said.

“……”

“Still, thanks for telling me. I’m sorry.” Seo Dawon looked worryingly at Ryu Hyerin, whose complexion paled. However, he eventually turned around without doing anything. Ryu Hyerin stood there for a while, even after he completely disappeared, shedding tears.

* * *

After that day, Ryu Hyerin avoided the Mage. Seo Dawon also seemed to take care not to bump into her unless it was essential.

Though she didn't tell Bae Jaemin about this matter, he visited her exactly one week later. She tried to ignore him, but the Priest knocked on her front door for at least 30 minutes; eventually, opening her door only as much as her chain latch would allow, he asked, "Why did you confess?"

"…Piss off."

"What did I say? I told you he was simply playing around with you."

Ryu Hyerin tried to close the front door–she wanted to hear none of this, but Bae Jaemin was faster. He slipped his hand through the gap. He grabbed the pendant of her necklace, which hung over her pajamas, with great force. The very same necklace that Seo Dawon had given her.

"By the way, you're still wearing this. Do you still have lingering feelings?"

"Let go. Do you really want to die?"

"I bet it's Seo Dawon who's courting death."

When Ryu Hyering heard that, the strength in her hands loosened.

Did she want to kill Seo Dawon? That's wrong. She was the one that wanted to die.

That day, when she grieved after being rejected by the Mage, she resolved to take her own life at the end of her lease period in about a week.

‘I’ll show them–I’ll jump off of the [Red Lotus] building. I hope he suffers for the rest of his life after looking at my body.’ She was still suffering from that delusion–that desire to have Seo Dawon feel her pain. She smiled shadily and responded, “No? I just want to stab you to death.”

“Or, were you thinking of killing yourself?” Bae Jaemin, once again, aimed directly at what’s in her heart. Ryu Hyerin flinched and shook her hand; he tore the latch off her door by force.

He strode inside and closed the door behind him; Ryu Hyerin could not prevent the door from closing since the Priest blocked her way. Once it slammed shut, she was left alone with the man.

Bae Jaemin dragged Ryu Hyerin into his embrace as soon as the door finished closing. She summoned a skill into her hand to really kill him, but the Priest slowly knelt down while hugging her. She really thought about lowering her hand and murdering him, but the Priest had such an unusual aura about him.

In the end, instead of attacking, she grabbed the Priest’s fluttering hair in one hand and roughly tilted back his head. “What a foolish thing to say.”

His face, when she pulled back his head, was wet with tears–a complete mess. Ryu Hyerin faltered in that moment. Bae Jaemin didn’t seem to care about her murderous attitude and rambled, “You…You have no idea I can use [Clairvoyance], right?”

“What?”

“This skill… The User won’t be able to see their own fate, but… But they can see the destinies of other people.” Bae Jaemin, who began muttering about something incomprehensible, began laughing like a hysterical person.

After his outburst of seizure-like laughter, he suddenly stopped and lowered his head back into her embrace. Then, voice subdued as if he were swallowing back shrieks, he asked, “You thought about jumping off the [Red Lotus] building. Yes?”

"……" Ryu Hyerin took a deep breath.

However, Bae Jaemin didn't stop there. "Should I tell you how Seo Dawon's life will go after you die?"

"……"

"He'll live fucking well."

"What…?"

"He'll live well, as if nothing happened." Bae Jaemin spoke confidently, as if he actually saw the future. "You think he'll regret his choice, right? No. Seo Dawon will continue to raid the dungeons as if nothing happened… He'll break through scenarios; he'll meet someone he loves–someone that isn't you–and live well. That's what his destiny is. He won't fail. He'll get everything he wants and rise to the heights of glory. It's the same no matter how many times I look. Nothing changes."

"Wh…What…."

"You don't know. Seo Dawon doesn't know either. That's right…Haah… Only I know…. Hahaha!"

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TL: I guess Seo Dawon really did treat her nicely but nothing more. He did seem taken aback at her confession. And he tried to let her down nicely too!

~~Actually, it kind of reminds me of some rejections I've given and received.~~

And Bae Jaemin's [Clairvoyance]! There's so much more to learn about it!

Also, I feel super bad for Kim Olim…she really did seem personally invested in Ryu Hyerin as a friend…and Ryu Hyerin just always hated her…

Footnotes

1. . The (electrical) cord 'matches,' is the original. Aka she can plug into his opinion.

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Ryu Hyerin wondered if he was drunk, but Bae Jaemin's gibberish did not stop there. He continued to ramble nonsense in a desperate voice. "You and Seo Dawon are always at odds…There's no future for you together. If you don't give up on him, you'll die. I bet Seo Dawon wouldn't budge one inch even if you die right in front of him? So, just give up."

"What on earth are you saying…"

"Also, Haah. That bastard…He's gay."

"…What?"

"I saw it! Through [Clairvoyance]! That bastard was with some guy…!" Bae Jaemin snapped his mouth shut, as if he had returned to his senses, when he saw Ryu Hyerin's furrowed, bewildered brows. Simultaneously, a red flush of shame spread across his pale cheeks.

However, Bae Jaemin continued to stick to his bizarre claim until the end. "Haah…Enough. That's enough, so…In any case, stop thinking about crazy things like jumping off a building for Seo Dawon. Understand?"

"……"

In her eyes, Bae Jaemin seemed like the crazy one, not herself.

Of course, because of her broken heart, she made an extreme resolution, but she wasn't sure if she could really jump off the rooftop. Therefore, in

Ryu Hyerin's eyes, the only one with a mental problem seemed to be Bae Jaemin–the person who came crying over something that had yet to happen.

What's more, he's now claiming that a guy who used to switch girls every day a few months ago is somehow gay?

Ryu Hyerin thought she might have drunk some wrong reagent from Choi Kyung-sik. If not that, maybe she's been drugged. Finally, she had enough; she kicked the Priest away.

"Knngh…!" Bae Jaemin, who had hung defenselessly to her body, was kicked away and collapsed onto the floor. His expression showed that he was unaware of what just happened; his distorted expression, staring at her foot, was such a spectacle.

It was as if…his crumpled face exuded a sense of extreme betrayal and indescribable disappointment; his eyes seemed to ask why she didn't recognize his sincerity. After seeing that face, Ryu Hyerin realized that Bae Jaemin truly believed the nonsense he spouted.

"You're totally crazy." Ryu Hyerin looked at Bae Jaemin as if she were looking at a madman. He suppressed his anger and shut his eyes tight to hold back his temper.

He must have expected this reaction; he looked somewhat resigned. "Haah…." Bae Jaemin lowered his head to the floor and sighed deeply, wearied. However, he did not end there. He calmed down and continued, "A fear years ago, I happened to learn the [Clairvoyance] skill within a dungeon. However, learning more about it, this skill was half as good as I hoped. I don't see the futures of any target I want at any time I want; it shows very brief flashes of the future at random times."

Ryu Hyerin knew he was going to try and have a sincere conversation about his ability to see the future; she coldly made a sarcastic remark to get him to stop talking. "You should really go to the hospital."

"…I saw you jump off the building as soon as the lease ends." Bae Jaemin swept a hand across his face and took a deep breath. "If not for that,

how would I have known and come all the way here.”

“……” Of course, that part tugged at her mind. Furthermore, Ryu Hyerin felt like today the Priest acted the most sincere–the most human–in all of their acquaintance.

However, common sense dictated that [Clairvoyance] was a skill used by high-ranking witches; the skill could also only be used by very few individuals. It was absurd to hear that he somehow learned the ability by obtaining a skill book.

Therefore, Ryu Hyerin speculated that, rather than actually having such an ability, Bae Jaemin was acting under a wrong delusion. Perhaps, like Murphy’s Law, things had gone the way he had foreseen several times, leading him to blame some mistaken skill for no reason at all.

So, she calmly asked again, “Then, show me another proof of your [Clairvoyance].”

“…Didn’t you hear what I just said? Even if I wanted to show you, my ability can’t be controlled.”

“Then, how am I supposed to believe you? Honestly, no, you’re real funny. Can you even call that a skill? Why do you believe that ability is real?”

Bae Jaemin looked blank at Ryu Hyerin’s continuous questions but soon shouted with a grim expression, “So, you think I’m lying?”

“Why are you getting frustrated at my disbelief? You’re the one who spouted this bullshit, first.” Dumbfounded, Ryu Hyerin stood up, still grasping Bae Jaemin’s arm. As soon as he stood up, she shook off his arm and shoved his shoulder.

The priest soon adopted a hurt expression and lowered his head. Then, grinding out a curse through his grim lips, he said, “…You’ll regret this, Ryu Hyerin.”

“Feel free to contact me if your [Clairvoyance] or whatever shows up again. Let’s call it a day.”

“……”

In the end, Bae Jaemin exited her abode without looking back. After hearing the front door slam shut, Ryu Hyerin released a long sigh.

A few minutes later, she stared down at her hand–the one that grabbed at the Priest’s hair. He’s a nutcase that belongs in a mental hospital, but… his face as he desperately clung to her, afraid of her death, came to the forefront of her mind belatedly.

Simultaneously, she remembered the face of the man who was always unconditionally in her thoughts. So, Seo Dawon, even if she were to jump and die…Fine. Bae Jaemin was probably correct about that. He probably wouldn’t bat an eyelid at her.

‘No… Even if Seo Dawon were to love me, he wouldn’t rush in without a care in the world as Bae Jaemin did…’

She couldn’t really imagine the man losing his composure. At the same time, it was quite ridiculous to make this comparison. The person she wanted wouldn’t make space for her beside him; the one she didn’t want kneeled and begged.

Ryu Hyerin smiled dryly and went out, biting two cigarettes in her mouth, to her veranda to smoke. Then, after throwing the cigarette butts onto an ashtray at one side of the veranda, she picked up her cell phone. The dial tone had stopped–the other had hung up–a few times; but, as expected, he didn’t avoid her for long.

After going to voice message three more times, Bae Jaemin finally received her call. When he answered the phone, he began exploding out after a moment’s silence.

–You told me to piss off for today.

“I changed my mind. Let me listen to your insane explanation.”

–You…

“Your pride is all ruined today anyway. Don’t play hard to get and just come back. You probably didn’t go too far anyway, right?”

–……

Bae Jaemin rang her doorbell three hours later. Ryu Hyerin looked up at his swollen eyes through the gap created by her still-broken latch.

So, as soon as the front door opened, she grabbed him by the collar and impulsively kissed him. Bae Jaemin grabbed her shoulder as if he were about to push her away before staying still, unable to follow through. Just as she expected. Bae Jaemin clenched his fist before accepting the kiss like a stone buddha; then, he soon dragged her angrily into his embrace and bit her lips roughly.

Ryu Hyerin’s excitement cooled off a little, nauseated by the tongue that shoved down her throat, but endured–Bae Jaemin had his eyes closed and was working so hard after all.

He made a good decision to close his eyes; she could clearly see his swollen eyelids–the result of crying–which had still yet to subside though three hours had passed.

* * *

For the first time in a long while, Ryu Hyerin was able to sleep well without being visited by nightmares or tossing and turning. However, when she opened her eyes and saw Bae Jaemin’s tired form sleeping next to her, she was slightly hit with the reality of the situation.

‘I want to kill her…’

She was talking about herself from yesterday.

She couldn't believe that this had happened because she felt sorry for the Priest…She blatantly stared at him; had she gone momentarily crazy? Yesterday's events came to mind, one after another.

'He's not so bad in combat… Is the way he uses his body there different from how he moves in this situation?' [1]

While thinking such rude thoughts, she, feeling a sudden weight on her shoulders (his arm), pressed on Bae Jaemin's nose to wake him up.

Bae Jaemin shook his head around before, soon, opening his eyes. He stared at her blankly, with a weary face, before his ears turned red. Now that he had belatedly grasped the situation, he hurriedly threw off her hand. "My clothes…"

"I did that because I had a damnably heavy arm pressing down on me."

"……" Bae Jaemin rushed–as if he had been burned–to lift the arm that had stifled her away. Ryu Hyerin wanted to point out the ridiculousness of his attitude but held back.

She went to the bathroom, stark naked, and washed at a leisurely pace. Perhaps he was waiting for her to take a shower; as soon as the water turned on, she heard a bump and a roll outside the bathroom. Ryu Hyerin held her breath before bursting into laughter.

"…What on earth?"

However, when she finished washing up, she couldn't see the Priest. She had thought he had gone out to buy something to eat, but she soon found him lying prone in the living room.

When she saw the blood streaming from the Priest's nose and mouth, all thoughts in her head vanished into a white void; she spread both hands out and deployed her skills.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: “That bastard…He’s gay.”

Technically, Jaemin, he’s bi.

Footnotes

1. She’s basically saying he’s bad at sex

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However, Bae Jaemin didn’t regain consciousness even though she activated her skills, taking herself to the limit.

“[Cure]!”

“…….”

“[Recovery]!”

“……”

“Bae Jaemin…Bae Jaemin open your eyes!”

“……”

Ryu Hyerin eventually gave up on her skills, opened her inventory with trembling hands, and placed a potion to the Priest’s lips.

His eyeballs had rolled up in their sockets. The man only resumed breathing in thin gasps, after she poured four bottles of advanced potions into his mouth, one right after the other.

When Bae Jaemin’s condition seemed to have improved enough to transfer him to a hospital, she rose from her seat to find a coat to wear.

“C…Cough…” But, at that moment, the prone Bae Jaemin suddenly opened his eyes, gasping and coughing. Ryu Hyerin hurriedly approached

him again; the Priest breathed deeply and furrowed his brows.

“Hey! What happened to you?” She shouted.

“…Hah.”

However, Bae Jaemin looked calm; it was as if he had collapsed like this before several times. He shook his hand to show he was fine before bowing his head, as if he were still suffering.

Ryu Hyerin looked at him anxiously and asked in a quiet tone, “Are you suffering from some chronic disease?”

“No.”

“Then, why did you suddenly collapse?”

“……” Bae Jaemin hesitated to answer; his lips flinched when Ryu Hyerin crouched in before him. Then, he continued grudgingly, “…It’s always like this after I see something with [Clairvoyance].”

“What?” Ryu Hyerin scrutinized the Priest’s face. Since he was with her the entire time, he couldn’t have taken any drugs… It felt meaningful that he had mentioned [Clairvoyance] in this situation.

‘…He can really see the future?’

Eventually, she kept quiet to allow him to finish talking.

Once he noticed that Ryu Hyerin wasn’t going to interrupt him, Bae Jaemin looked at her. “Do you…believe me now?”

“No. But… I don’t think you’d go so far as to bleed out to deceive me.”

“……”

“Tell me. What is this [Clairvoyance] you keep talking about.”

Bae Jaemin faced her, a complicated expression on his face. After a short sigh, he began to explain what happened when he first received the skill. “When I first got it…there were no side effects. I had almost no ability to see even a glimpse of the future either; the skill had no proficiency. In fact, I thought I was scammed by the skill book… There was nothing to the skill. However, this was supposedly something that could see the future? I was too curious; I couldn’t be patient.”

Following that dramatic opening statement, he continued after a brief silence. “So… I started practicing; I thought things might change if I improved my skill level. I would use it often while looking at the people around me. And…After a difficult climb to the intermediate rank… At long last, I could begin to tangibly see a person’s ‘luck.'”

“A person’s luck?”

Bae Jaemin nodded at her inquiring tone. His eyes sparkled, as if he had been mentally plunged into some distant memory, “Yeah. I could see it so very clearly.”

“…?”

“I knew it when I saw it–I could see the signs of a ‘born-lucky’ human being. An ordinary User’s luck was mostly invisible or had a faint outline, but all successful users had golden lines floating around their bodies. And… of all the people I saw, Seo Dawon was the most spectacular.”

“Seo Dawon?”

“At first, the golden lines surrounding him were so dazzling, I could barely see his face.”

Ryu Hyerin’s lips slightly twisted; the Priest’s appreciation for Seo Dawon strangely overlapped with her own feelings when she first saw the Mage. However, this was quite an interesting story, so she tamped down her desire to tease Bae Jaemin and paid him her full attention. “Continue.”

"…Actually, Seo Dawon was the type to extend his luck to his surroundings. The people around him were highly talented as well… That is to say, those people were originally born with a high amount of luck, but, when they acted in tandem with the Mage, their luck strengthened. In short, he's the core. I've never seen anyone else who had his type of luck. Even now."

"…Hmm."

"Anyway, that's why I decided to throw in my lot with Seo Dawon. I couldn't see my own natural luck, but, through this ability, I could find those whose lifepath was on the rise… That is to say, I believed my career wouldn't fail if I was with the Mage."

Bae Jaemin had been startled by the Mage's luck after their coincidental meeting; during his investigation, he noticed that the Mage was spreading his luck around. Therefore, he began to make preparations to join the man's party.

He analyzed the regular members at [Red Lotus]–he thought about what they lacked and what class they needed the most. Then, he waited until they were recruiting new members; before even becoming an official temporary participant in their raids, he tried to show off his skills before the Mage's observant eyes.

His efforts were eventually recognized; he received Seo Dawon's offer to join [Red Lotus] when the raid completed. There were no snags up until this point.

"However, after joining [Red Lotus]…my [Clairvoyance] skill advanced significantly. If I could only see one's luck before then, afterwards I could predict one's incoming bad luck or catastrophes. I began seeing a black line–the gold line's opposite."

"……"

"And… If certain conditions were met, I could co-opt another's luck and convert it into my own."

After hearing that, Ryu Hyerin paused and stared at Bae Jaemin.

He nodded with a jubilant smile; he had expected her surprise. “That’s right. I was able to take and use Seo Dawon’s colossal luck.”

“You’re kidding me!” Ryu Hyerin reflexively denied.

Regardless, Bae Jaemin continued, “You don’t believe me, right? I could barely believe it either. But, you know, I was someone who would barely be able to do a chin-up while the others in [Red Lotus] do push-ups; I wasn’t always someone who had the potential to become a High Priest, like I am now. However, as I moved with Seo Dawon, I snatched his luck and started using it for myself. My skills began to drastically improve at that moment.”

“Then…”

“At first, I doubted this ability as well. I doubted it for far longer than you.”

“……”

“But, even I had to concede to the facts; everytime I absorbed Seo Dawon’s luck, my results changed completely. I avoided major injuries by a hair’s breadth; I kept getting good items from random reward chests. If a skill was supposed to fail five out of ten times, the number of failures would reduce to two out of ten.” Bae Jaemin whispered to her with a mean-looking smile, “Furthermore… When I took his luck, Seo Dawon began to have troubles with women. No matter who he met, there would suddenly be a fall-out or he’d break up with her. It was then Seo Dawon’s reputation would fall as his personal life would trend in mass media.”

“……”

“That may have happened because I absorbed his luck. After all, it takes luck to meet good people, right?”

Ryu Hyerin found it hard to believe all of the Priest’s words. The more she listened, the more his [Clairvoyance] skill sounded like a cheat–a fraud.

Something to shake the entire foundation of User Society, more than any other class or skill. She couldn't help but be suspicious as she'd never heard of such a skill.

However, Bae Jaemin had such absolute confidence in his story that it was difficult for her to flatly deny it. So, she asked, "If what you said is true… Aren't you someone born with incredible luck? That in and of itself is a ridiculous skill…"

Bae Jaemin fell silent. Then, in a downcast voice, "…That's what I thought not too long ago. 'Perhaps I'm the truly lucky one,' things like that. 'If this continues, then perhaps pushing Seo Dawon off the top spot wouldn't be a mere dream'… But…"

"But?"

"Things changed when my [Clairvoyance] skill upgraded to the highest rank." Bae Jaemin's face was momentarily pierced by a fear that he could not hide. "I started dreaming. If I could only see vague strands before… That is to say, before it was more like [Forecast] rather than [Clairvoyance]…. But, finally, I could see the future through my dreams, finally something suitable for a skill named [Clairvoyance]."

"And?"

"The dreams were an issue." Bae Jaemin looked pale, as if he were reluctant to speak on the subject of his dreams.

However, Ryu Hyerin looked at him, hurriedly urging him. After a long silence, the Priest spoke falteringly, as if he were broaching some deep secret. "I dreamt of…Seo Dawon murdering me."

Become a Patron!

TL: AHHHHHH There’s too many revelations in this chapter? Stealing Luck? Dreams of being murdered by Seo Dawon? SEO DAWONS GIRLFRIENDS AND HIS DATING HISTORY MESSED WITH BY BAE JAEMIN? The man is so totally private and mum about his life–he probably wouldn’t open his mouth to explain or defend himself to others. Even if things ended unfortunately for him.

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After hearing that, Ryu Hyerin couldn’t hold back her laughter. “Pfffthahahahaha!”

Bae Jaemin stared at her blankly. Then, belatedly, he flushed and shouted, “How could you laugh at that? Do you think this is a joke?”

“Pfft, hm. N-No. If it were me… If I learned that someone was stealing my luck, I would want to kill him immediately.”

“Hey…!” Bae Jaemin gave her a resentful glare, wondering how she could joke in this situation.

She shrugged and replied, “How could you have no guts after all that you’ve done.”

“It’s not a matter of guts…!”

“Enough. So, since then you’ve been too frightened and haven’t used Seo Dawon’s luck at all?”

“……” He didn’t answer, but she needed no response. Of course he’d try to save himself. Bae Jaemin was someone who was born with only that much forethought. It was truly unfortunate that his amazing abilities were awarded to someone like him and his narrow mentality.

However, Bae Jaemin pouted, “Of course I used his luck. You asked me to stop Seo Dawon’s engagement.”

“What?”

“That’s how I did it. I stole Seo Dawon’s luck. Also… Ahem…”

“……?”

“Well, in any case, that’s what happened.” Bae Jaemin said nothing more, keeping his mouth shut. His expression conveyed that he misspoke. Ryu Hyerin didn’t pry anymore, but she had perceived what he meant.

‘After that, I dreamed of my death. That’s when he used the luck he took from Seo Dawon and came to my house…So, this bastard thought he would be able to sleep with me because of that luck…’

‘How terribly pathetic,’ but she showed no signs of her inner thoughts on her face.

‘Then, does that mean he can store the luck he’s taken and use it whenever necessary…? If he can save what he’s stored…’ After thinking that far, Ryu Hyerin sneakily dragged Bae Jaemin into her embrace. “Bae Jaemin, I have a question.”

“…What is it?”

“That luck, can you share some of it with me?”

Bae Jaemin looked at her, bewildered. His disappointed expression conveyed his dismay that she would hug him just to ask that sort of question. Ryu Hyerin snorted after seeing his face.

“You want me to share my luck…”

“What? Just answer me. Can you give me some or not?”

He bit his lips tearfully, but, as soon as she began to place some force in her arms, he eventually blurted, “Knngh! I can’t…! I can only connect with Seo Dawon and take some of his luck.”

“Tsk.”

“What do you mean, ‘tsk.’ Did I ever advertise I could do that?”

“Then, have you ever shared the fruit of your luck with me? You’ve never! So, why are you acting like you’ve been robbed?”

“……” Perhaps struck speechless, Bae Jaemin bowed his head.

Removing herself from his side, she muttered, “What a shame. For that skill to be only usable by someone made of straw.” [1]

“……”

“So, you’re saying that this luck can only go from one person to another. Right?”

“……That’s right.” Bae Jaemin seemed uncomfortable with how she described him as a man made of straw. However, it was apparent that he wanted her to forget the point that he could take another’s luck.

Ryu Hyerin almost had a cramp in her cheek from holding back her laughter. But, after listening to him, she thought of something even funnier and more chaotic. So, she quickly schooled her expression and whispered lowly in his ear. This was absolutely important. “But, if you can really suck away someone’s luck.”

“……”

“What happens when that person runs out of luck? What will happen to Seo Dawon? Is he going to die?”

“…What?”

“You said you used a lot–as much as you pleased. Wouldn’t it run out at some point?”

Bae Jaemin looked a little shocked–as if he hadn’t thought that far. And, after being unable to answer for a while, he said in a pleading, unsure voice, “No way, He wouldn’t die…”

“No, more than that, have you ever thought about killing Seo Dawon?”

“……” Ryu Hyerin noted that Bae Jaemin’s nape turned moist from tension and sweat in an instant; just the thought of attacking Seo Dawon must have frightened him. However, she continued, disregarding his reaction. “Perhaps the future your [Clairvoyance] showed you was an unfortunate event that is highly likely to occur.”

“……”

“Then… Do you think you can escape that death if you remain still?”

Bae Jaemin threw a tantrum at her words, “Are you telling me to kill Seo Dawon? What is this?!”

“I was going to help you.”

“What?” Bae Jaemin’s face was filled with distrust–no other emotion.

Well, even if they had this conversation today, she had praised Seo Dawon in front of him for way more than 1 or 2 days.

She thought he’d be burning with the desire to conquer, but she had unexpectedly stumbled upon something interesting. However, she couldn’t miss this golden opportunity, even if Bae Jaemin would be content to let it tumble out of his grasp. Ryu Hyerin changed her direction and adopted a disappointed expression, “Then did you really think I’d…just let you die?”

“…..!”

Looking at Bae Jaemin’s expression at that moment, Ryu Hyerin bit the inside of her mouth–until it bled–in order to contain her laughter. She whispered to him, keeping her face deadly serious, “According to you, luck is something you’re born with… But you’re someone that can extort another’s natural destiny.”

“Th-That’s true, but…”

“Then, you should be able to change your own destiny as well.”

Bae Jaemin looked like he didn’t know what he should say. Ryu Hyerin gave him another shove, “Besides, you’ve already changed my fate. Don’t you remember? You said I would commit suicide.”

“……”

“Then, you shouldn’t give up either–you should change the future where Seo Dawon murders you.”

“……”

Ryu Hyerin watched as several conflicting emotions flickered across Bae Jaemin’s face.

He didn’t agree, but Ryu Hyerin was certain: Bae Jaemin will soon be inclined to acquiesce to her impulsive words. If that were to happen… Won’t Seo Dawon become a mess–just like she was right now?

* * *

The last day of the lease:

Ryu Hyerin laughed at Kim Olim for the first time and cajoled the Paladin to buy her a meal. Kim Olim looked puzzled at first, but then a happy expression took over as she promised to do exactly that. And, in a few days, the two sat face to face in a private room in a luxury restaurant.

“What a shame. How much time did you say you had left in your contract with [Opera]?”

“About a year and a half?”

“Come to [Red Lotus] as soon as that’s finished. We’ll match any offers and agree to any conditions.”

Judging from the Paladin's normal attitude, Ryu Hyerin guessed that Seo Dawon did not tell his deputy about the failed confession incident. Therefore, Ryu Hyerin smiled awkwardly, purposefully showcasing her emotions so that Kim Olim would notice.

Wiping her mouth with a napkin, Kim Olim frowned. "Or, did you have another guild in mind?"

"Mm, It's not that… Ryu Hyerin trailed off at the end of her sentence before bowing her head. Then, she raised her head again while smiling; unwiped tears flowed from the corners of her eyes.

Kim Olim looked at her, startled, "Hyerin-ah, what's wrong?"

"No, I… I'm sorry. I…I've been crying a lot these days…"

Kim Olim gave Ryu Hyerin a worried glance and gave the young priest a handkerchief. Ryu Hyerin intentionally sniffled after wiping away her tears.

As a result, Kim Olim's expression drastically darkened. "If it's about your parents again… Or if the [Opera] guildmaster is threatening you…"

Ryu Hyerin smiled and waved her hands, "No, no…. Ah… It's… Actually, I was rejected recently. Haha. I look like an idiot, right?"

"What? What kind of crazy guy did that?" Kim Olim stared, unable to comprehend.

At that moment, Ryu Hyerin smiled, pretending to calm herself down although, inside, her anger was steadily rising. In the end, she clearly revealed the identity of the man who agitated her without speaking his name directly.

After gauging her reactions, Kim Olim remained silent for a while before sighing, "Seo Dawon definitely is a…good guildmaster, but…"

"……"

"I believe there's a better…match for you out there."

Ryu Hyerin continued to shed tears–now, though, her head was fully bowed. She's come this far; it's basically a success.

As expected, Kim Olim was the one to break the long silence. She soothed the Priest; the ends of her sentences trailed off as if she were sincerely apologetic. "I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do to help you here… Although Seo Dawon and I are close, I can't force Seo Dawon's hand in this sort of matter…"

The words Ryu Hyerin was waiting for had come out; Ryu Hyerin immediately cut in, removing the handkerchief she had been dabbing to her eyes. "Still, just once… Can't you make space for me to be alone with guildmaster-nim?"

"What?"

"It's just…I was rejected before I could confess properly; that's been lingering in my heart…"

"……"

"If I had just one hour…I want to have a proper conversation with him."

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my god, that's so sociopathic. I can't even.

Footnotes

1. She’s calling him a coward and useless. Substanceless, essentially.

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Chapter 275

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Kim Olim refused at first–she didn't think she should intervene in their matters.

However, Ryu Hyerin knew that Kim Olim was particularly 'sympathetic' towards her. Before, she didn't often hang around with the Paladin because she didn't like the pitying yet considerate gaze. However, this week, she bothered the paladin constantly.

Ryu Hyerin had even bought a diet potion and starved for several days. She felt even happier when she saw Kim Olim's nervous expression–as if the paladin was worried that she'd waste away.

In the end, Kim Olim surrendered. Ryu Hyerin didn't need to do anything; the paladin acquiesced after looking at the recovery band on her wrist. With a furious expression, Kim Olim dragged her into the meeting room. "Ryu Hyerin, are you even eating nowadays?"

"……"

"What happened to your wrist?"

Ryu Hyerin pulled down her sleeves without answering, acting as if she wanted to hide her shame. Kim Olim opened her mouth–fully ready to explode–before trying to calm down. She adopted a soothing tone, as if she were trying to persuade a disobedient younger sister. "Seo Dawon is really inappropriate for your first relationship. Even if you didn't confess…Seo Dawon must have known. If he wanted to date you, he would have

confessed to you the moment he noticed your feelings. That man moves fast.”

“……”

“However, he would have pretended not to notice your feelings. What do you think that means?”

Ryu Hyerin answered quietly in a placid voice, head lowered. “Enough…”

Then, she wriggled her arms to get out of Kim Olim’s hold. Of course, the paladin didn’t let her go; Kim Olim shouted, frustrated, “Hyerin-ah, why are you acting so silly? You’ll be embarrassed about this stubbornness in a few years. In the future, you’ll meet a man way more amazing than Seo Dawon…!”

“I’ve never gotten what I’ve wanted, Olim-unni.” Ryu Hyerin said, cutting off the Paladin’s words calmly. She felt genuinely depressed as she confessed that. At the same time, that outpour of emotions was fortunate since she could now shed tears without much difficulty. Ryu Hyerin felt really, really sorry for herself–enough to make herself cry.

At that sight, Kim Olim, though she still adopted a stern expression, rushed to give the Priest a handkerchief. Ryu Hyerin leaned her head away and rejected that helping hand. She would look more pitiful, after all, if the tears kept flowing.

After sighing deeply, Ryu Hyerin continued in a mournful voice, “Nobody wants me either…”

“No, it’s just Seo Dawon that doesn’t want you; there are many people that want and care for you.”

“My heart won’t fill up with anyone else.”

“……”

“Unni has always gotten whatever she wanted. There’s nothing that hasn’t fallen into your hands, right? So, I’m sure you won’t understand me, but…”

“……”

“I don’t need anything else–I only want Dawon-oppa.”

Kim Olim looked down at Ryu Hyerin with a shocked expression. However, her perplexed expression–as if she was looking at something incomprehensible–quickly dispersed. The paladin carefully wiped away Ryu Hyerin’s tears and exhaled deeply, “I can try engineering a meeting between you two.”

“……”

Kim Olim continued in a dejected voice, “But, if Seo Dawon doesn’t like someone…That’s not an issue I can change.” She had to draw a line somewhere.

“I understand.”

“In fact, Seo Dawon may act worse in order to discourage you.”

“That’s fine.” Ryu Hyerin wanted to laugh now that her plan was finally being implemented.

However, Kim Olim looked at her and continued in a calm tone, “You’ll come to regret this request someday.”

“…….”

“Hyerin-ah. You aren’t supposed to… sway and exert your force on people like this. I can’t break your stubbornness now, but…”

The Priest flinched at the cold tone and looked up; she met Kim Olim’s deeply worried eyes. She almost retreated a step. The paladin’s deep, dignified eyes–which the Priest had always been uncomfortable with–penetrated her to her core.

“You can’t do something like this next time,” Kim Olim said.

“……” She couldn’t say anything, but Kim Olim calmly turned her back after that last remark.

The Priest was filled with a strange, anxious feeling, so she grabbed Kim Olim’s arm inadvertently. However, the Priest couldn’t say anything once she grabbed the other’s arm; Kim Olim simply stared at the Priest before patting her on the head as if to reassure her.

“Yes, well…I’ll make an appointment for the weekend. In the meantime, don’t skip your meals…”

“……”

“And don’t do anything stupid.” After such generous appeasement, Kim Olim slowly left the meeting room. Ryu Hyerin stood still until her unni turned the corner and completely disappeared from view.

Her plan was successful, but she still felt rather sour. Ryu Hyerin often thought that Kim Olim treated her like a fool, but she couldn’t even entertain those thoughts today.

Even though she had succeeded in deceiving the Paladin, she couldn’t even sneer at the woman or be confident in her victory.

* * *

“I didn’t know Hyerin-ie was invited as well.” Seo Dawon said after a short silence, a few days later, as Ryu Hyerin arrived inside the appointed meeting room.

Rather than talking to Ryu Hyerin, his tone contained an odd nuance directed at Kim Olim, who sat next to the Priest. It seemed like he was rebuking the Paladin, ‘I didn’t think you would force me to be in this sort of position.’

Sure enough, that nuance didn’t escape her notice; Kim Olim glanced towards Ryu Hyerin and nodded, “I’ve been a bit nosy today. However,

you’ve promised to give me two full hours, so please honor your words.”

“….Hmmm. Alright.” Seo Dawon smiled almost incomprehensibly and nodded.

Only then was Ryu Hyerin able to escape his gaze, which made her feel lacking, and sat down in her seat. Soon afterwards, Kim Olim sighed and stood up. “I’ll be right back.”

“You’re only going to snack on the appetizer and leave?”

“I said I’m coming back.”

Seo Dawon joked around with a wistful look, yet his words to the parting Kim Olim still had some bite. “Fine, come back later. It’s quite delicious here.” [/efn_note] delicious is, of course, referring to drama. Alongside the food that they’re eating. Popcorn is always tastier when flavored with drama. [/efn_note]

“……” Kim Olim opened the door and left without answering. Ryu Hyerin calmly raised her head after hearing the door close behind her.

Seo Dawon stared at her, as if he were seeing her for the first time in his life. “How did you persuade Olim? She’s not the type of person to engineer a situation like this.” He smiled as he spoke, but his words went straight to the point. Instead of answering, Ryu Hyerin blinked and took a sip of the soup–smooth and delicious–in front of her.

Seo Dawon waited for her to empty the whole bowl of soup. Ryu Hyerin, after supplying enough food to her starving body, wiped her mouth daintily with a napkin.

Then, she raised her head; Seo Dawon wasn’t even looking at her–he was checking something on his cellphone. However, sensing her stare, he asked again without raising his head. “So, what did you want to tell me?”

“I wanted to ask why you rejected me earlier.”

Seo Dawon sighed silently and placed down his cell phone. Then, he looked at her. It felt as if he were asking, ‘Are you really asking something pathetic like this?’ But, since she was waiting for a response, he answered without delay, “It’s because I’m not attracted to you.”

“You knew I liked you, though, correct?”

“And?”

“Have you never considered it? Why? Is it because I’m young? Or because I have no money?”

Seo Dawon seemed a little speechless at those words; after reading the seriousness in her eyes, he leaned back languidly against his chair. Then, he calmly replied, “Money…Haah… I don’t think you’ll understand even if I explain.”

“……”

“Still, that’s not the reason.”

“Then?”

“Because you aren’t fun.”

Ryu Hyerin bit her lips. However, Seo Dawon continued to speak, not even hesitating after seeing her expression, “You treat my words like gospel.”

“I…”

“I want to converse and get to know people better…isn’t that how one begins to like another? That’s how I choose who to date.”

“……”

“There’s not much I particularly want to know about you.”

Ryu Hyerin wasn’t convinced by the Mage’s words.

He’s only ever been with successful women–what’s the point of trying to hide his snobbish side now? She couldn’t see the difference between what she said and what he said.

‘He always smiles when talking with me. He had fun as well. How could he go and say that it’s a matter of personality differences now?!’

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TL: The audacity of it all! Did she just really say that Kim Olim never went through any hardships? Who knows if it’s true or not, but that’s very self-centered to say.

And, because Ryu Hyerin never properly learned the inherent worth of human life (and how not to judge them for how useful they’d be to others), she just can’t understand what Seo Dawon is saying.

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T.w: self-harm

As if he had guessed the Priest's inner thoughts, Seo Dawon said, "It's not that I don't like you. You're just not my type."

"……"

"Therefore, I would like it if you wouldn't think that there's a problem with you or me. It's just… We don't match." Seo Dawon said, staring at her.

Ryu Hyerin felt endlessly shabby in front of the Mage. She had come here believing that this conversation was her last chance, but there were no chinks in the Mage's armor.

He didn't even seem to be affected by Ryu Hyerin's confession. She started to feel nervous, and she unwittingly grabbed at the recovery band attached to her wrist and began to tear it off. As the skin underneath the tab peeled away, irritated by her continual actions, blood began to seep out, little by little.

Seo Dawon looked at Ryu Hyerin, her head bowed silently; he soon approached her with a puzzled expression. "What are you doing?"

"……" Ryu Hyerin only returned to her senses when the Mage came close. She hid her wrist with her other hand, but it seemed as if the other had already seen.

His brows furrowed for the first time. Seo Dawon simply grabbed her arm, pulling it away from the other arm–her defenses were batted aside

easily. When he saw the pinch marks and the torn skin–where blood had welled up–he coldly said, “Did Kim Olim see this too?”

“Let…go of me.”

“How could I simply let this go? Since when have you been this way?”

It hasn’t been long. This habit appeared the day she asked for a favor from Kim Olim.

However, in these past few days, she consciously realized that hurting herself would significantly reduce the sinking feeling in her stomach. A small injury like this would heal quickly if she wiped at it with a cloth wetted with potion. Besides, she wouldn’t ever wound herself too horribly… At least, that’s what she thought.

Although Seo Dawon had ripped away her defenses, the injury wasn’t life-threatening; she only felt ashamed. Ryu Hyerin shouted at him in a withering tone, “This…Isn’t your business! Besides, you don’t like me anyway…”

“Are you out of your mind?” Seo Dawon did not back down.

Ryu Hyerin struggled angrily before shooting back harsh words, “Does that matter?! Don’t pretend you care now. You’d be more at ease if I were to die! Even when I confessed, you looked at me like I was some tiresome bother..!”

“Hyerin-ah, stop throwing a damn tantrum. Are you trying my patience because I’m not throwing insults at you?”

“W-What…”

She froze–Seo Dawon spouted harsh swear words at her… words he usually reserved for Woo Ragi and Choi Kyungsik.

Because the Mage never swore at her, like he did with the other guildmates, even when she made mistakes or acted immature, Ryu Hyerin

thought Seo Dawon treated her specially. In contrast, his current behavior compounded her shock.

Seo Dawon took the blood-stained gauze off her stiffened wrist, took out a potion from his inventory, and poured it over her wound. When he saw that the wound did not immediately recover–the potion simply frothed a bit as the wounds faded very slowly–his expression appeared similar to a Yaksha's face. [1] "Did you use a potion on this yesterday?"

"N-No…"

"Answer me properly."

"I didn't…"

"Then, if you didn't use one, why are you experiencing a superimposed reaction? That kind of reaction only occurs when a potion has been used in the last 24 hours. Do you think you're smarter than me?"

"……" For the first time, Ryu Hyerin was able to understand, with her whole body, why Choi Kyung-sik was so scared of Seo Dawon. Not only was he able to immediately see through her lies, but the Mage's aura intimidated her so much that she couldn't even say anything. It felt like a horrible weight pressing down on her soul and body.

Eventually, Ryu Hyerin hung her head; Seo Dawon threw away the half-used potion back into his inventory before taking out a hair-tie-sized round chain. Then, he tied it around her now-healthy wrist.

[Action-Restricting Taming Chain]

Type: Chain
Durability: 1
Equipment Level Restriction: 250

Special Skills:

[Correction]

If the Wearer attempts a specific action specified by the User, the User is alerted.

Description:
A chain made by Seo Dawon exclusively for taming monsters. It can correct a monster's bad behavior.]

He was essentially treating her like some trainable monster, but she could not resist the threatening pressure pouring forth from the Mage.

After fitting the chain around her wrist, he placed a 'make no sound' spell on it; the magic permeated through the metal. He released Ryu Hyerin's wrist from his hold.

"…What is this?" She asked.

"From now on, every time you do something insane, this'll send me an alarm."

"What happens when you receive an alarm?"

"Try it out if you're so curious."

"……" Feeling incredibly emotional, Ryu Hyerin shed tears.

The Mage didn't care about that; he even began mumbling angrily about Kim Olim as well. "Kim Olim, you bastard, if you saw something like this you should have let me know first. What am I supposed to do if you're swayed by some child's desires."

"…O-Olim Unni was…"

"Shut up. Are you in a position to stand up for others right now?"

"……" At the mention of Kim Olim, Ryu Hyerin immediately and automatically tried to craft an excuse, but she could only bite her lips at the Mage's rebuke.

After watching her bite her lips, Seo Dawon suddenly grabbed her chin. At first, Ryu Hyerin had no idea what was going on, but she was only released after her teeth stopped nibbling on her lips.

She looked down at her wrist, just in case. As expected, the chain shined golden before the light slowly faded away. Only then did Ryu Hyerin realize the power of the chain–the binding and restrictive force it had on all her actions.

She clenched her lips and looked up at the Mage, who was still standing by her side. He looked lost in thought, but, as soon as he felt her sharp gaze, he made eye contact without avoiding her stare.

Ryu Hyerin said reproachfully, “I’m really confused.”

“……”

“You don’t want to see me hurt myself? Why? Oppa and I have no relationship.”

Seo Dawon barked out a short laugh, “What do you mean by that? We do have a relationship.”

“What?”

“You’re just not my lover. You’re the Priest that I’ve reared–you and I have dungeoned together for over two years.”

“……”

“If two people aren’t lovers, then are they nothing to each other? Then, why do you feel sorry to Kim Olim?”

Though her face flushed at the reasonable criticism, Ryu Hyerin didn’t give up and clung to the Mage, “I want more than that. Why else would I have hurt myself.”

“You shouldn’t say that sort of thing to me–that’s something you should reserve for the doctor when you go to the hospital.”

“Don’t be sarcastic! Think a little! Oppa only has to change his mind and heart a tiny amount. You said you didn’t dislike me!”

“By the way, psychiatrists don’t date their patients.”

“Ah, seriously! Then just leave me alone! It’s not like I’m seriously injured; I just ripped off a few layers of skin…!”

Seo Dawon interrupted her; his voice was calm, “Hyerin-ah, I didn’t think you’d find it this hard to understand.”

“……”

“If Kim Olim did something like this, I’d lock her up in a hospital and stay by her side for 24 hours.”

“……”

“Do you also think that’s love?”

Ryu Hyerin’s face grew redder because Seo Dawon was trying to define a line between them. She shouted, “Since when have you taken care of everyone else–as if it’s common sense…!”

“I’ve always been a sensible, reasonable person. I’ve always been generous to those that don’t do anything stupid. You know that well, right?”

“…I, I… was never a special existence for Oppa…? Not even a little? Really?”

“Yeah. I think you’re behaving this way because you haven’t met many people.”

Everything felt distant to Ryu Hyerin, as if a huge wall surrounded her. Reeling from anger and despair, she embraced Seo Dawon’s waist even harder. The Mage didn’t shake her off, but he didn’t return her hug either. She weeped, “Then… If you knew I liked you… Why… were you like that. Why…”

“……”

“I’d rather you have treated me horribly… You could have done that…”

Seo Dawon patiently patted her on the head. Ryu Hyerin knew he was trying to placate her, but she could only weep louder.

There was no shame to be found here. She already felt like she had come so far; she couldn’t return without the Mage. She couldn’t accept his rejection because she firmly believed that no one else would make her happy.

Eventually, Seo Dawon stood by her side until she had exhausted herself from crying. However, what she wanted wouldn’t come out of his mouth. “Hyerin-ah, think carefully about what you truly want.”

“……”

“About your feelings for me. It isn’t love.”

“…Are you negating my feelings now?”

“You might like me, but only to the extent of wanting to be by my side.”

“……”

“It’s a terrible feeling to be pitied by someone you love.”

“……”

At that time, Ryu Hyerin couldn’t understand what he said. And, Seo Dawon smiled bitterly when, judging by her vacant expression, he realized she didn’t understand.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: They all need ~*therapy*~

…except, psychiatrists apparently exist? Honestly, counseling should be mandatory for Users. Also, gah, I feel like my brain is hurting from Hyerin's logic. Also Next Time: Back from the flashback!

Footnotes

1. The yaksha is dual-natured in Buddhist mythology. On one hand, it could be something akin to a nature fairy; on the other, it's a ghost that feasts upon and harasses people. In this case, Ryu Hyerin is saying that Seo Dawon is making a monstrous expression.

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‘…That’s what I thought, back then.’ After being submerged in memories of the past, Ryu Hyerin returned to her senses at the sound of someone tearing at their fingertips and looked straight ahead. Chasing the sound with her head, she soon found Bae Jaemin staring vacantly out the window, picking at his fingertips so much that it bled.

She thought they had finished their conversation from earlier, but Bae Jaemin still acted uneasily, as if there was still something seizing his thoughts. Ryu Hyerin, goosebumps raising on her skin for some reason, suppressed her irritation and spoke shortly, “Don’t do that.”

“……..” Bae Jaemin blinked, as if he didn’t realize that he was ruining his fingertips until she pointed it out.

However, now that she pointed it out, he stopped picking at his nails; though he still looked to be in a bad shape. Bae Jaemin let out a totally hoarse sigh and groaned in pain.

Ryu Hyerin couldn’t understand what was wrong with him, but she approached the Priest for now.

As she patted him gently on the back, Bae Jaemin opened his mouth and said, voice cracking, “…Something feels off.”

“What is it?”

“It’s strange. I keep feeling like I’ve been missing something.”

“Because of Lim Jisoo?”

“……”

Ryu Hyerin quietly stared at Bae Jaemin and his lack of answers.

It seemed that what made Bae Jaemin anxious currently was the aftermath–the consequences–that may arrive after summoning Lim Jisoo. Of course, Ryu Hyerin also knew what a dangerous individual Lim Jisoo was; she didn’t want to drag that person into the plan to get rid of [Red Lotus]. What a shame it turned out this way. It felt like they had held hands with a fox in order to drive away a tiger.

However, from Ryu Hyerin’s perspective, Lim Jisoo was destined to rot in prison for life after helplessly losing to Seo Dawon if the woman had not met them. Even if she avoided prison, she would have to leave East Asia, her main stage; she wouldn’t be able to live life as she desired.

So, the Priest treated Lim Jisoo like a partner. And, compared to the notoriety the woman had acquired, Lim Jisoo was quite kind to Ryu Hyerin. Therefore, Ryu Hyerin couldn’t fully understand Bae Jaemin’s internal agony.

No matter how long she waited Bae Jaemin wouldn’t answer, so she spoke in a firmer tone, “You know that the people that joined in on the [Oath] can’t kill each other.”

“It’s not that…” Bae Jaemin kept bowing his head while listening to Ryu Hyerin. He looked precarious and unstable, like cracked glass.

She noticed that Bae Jaemin had been like that ever since their renewed raid on the [Tower of Command] dungeon. His depression had gotten graver after Park Hoseok’s death. Eventually, Ryu Hyerin decided to stop pretending ignorance and waiting for him to climb out of his depression on his own. She broached the topic they both had been avoiding, “Have you realized that you’ve been a bit…unstable ever since the new raid on the [Tower of Command]?”

"……"

"Is this something you can't vent about? Even to me?"

"I'd never deceive you…"

"Then, tell me. You've been weird since then."

"……" Bae Jaemin eventually clenched his fist at the gentle urging. He knew that Ryu Hyerin endured months of his behavior without getting angry at him.

She wasn't the type to wait patiently for something she desired–whether it be material items or information; her temper was fiery. However, when Bae Jaemin failed to confide in her, she did him a service and loyally turned the other eye.

In the end, Bae Jaemin revealed the anxieties that were hidden deep within his heart, one after another. "…I think things have gone wrong ever since then."

"Ever since the [Tower of Command] raid?"

"Yeah," Bae Jaemin automatically bit his lips. To stop him, Ryu Hyerin gently stroked his lips. Bae Jaemin stared at her hand before gritting his teeth, "Actually, there's something I haven't told you."

"What is it?"

"On the day we renewed our raid on the [Tower of Command], I had a strange dream. Seo Dawon appeared in the Tower's basement…"

"……"

"In my dream, he stood in front of me."

Ryu Hyerin's complexion changed when he emphasized the word, 'dream.' Bae Jaemin always adopted a particular nuanced tone when talking about his [Clairvoyance] skill.

At first, she found his skill to be an utterly unbelievable ability, but Bae Jaemin truly had the ability to see the future. She could no longer calmly pass by his claims as nonsense anymore since Bae Jaemin had always used his ability to great effect before initiating their plans. Ryu Hyerin removed her arm from around his body and sharply asked, “Why are saying that now?”

“It doesn’t make sense. How could a dead man appear before me?”

“…….”

“Of course I didn’t realize the dream was part of my [Clairvoyance]. I just thought it was some silly dream. But, it made me uncomfortable…so I went to the place where Seo Dawon appeared in that dream.”

“Was there anything strange there?”

“…No. I didn’t find anything.” Honestly, that day, Bae Jaemin wanted to take a closer look around the area. However, he was with Lim Jisoo, who knew nothing about his [Clairvoyance] skill.

Bae Jaemin had never revealed the existence of that skill to anyone except for Ryu Hyerin. Therefore, he had to drag around Lim Jisoo without responding to her acerbic and sarcastic remarks and could only investigate halfheartedly. Furthermore, he found it hard to shake off the temptation to just optimistically label his dream as an impossibility.

“Then, what’s the problem?” Ryu Hyerin asked.

“However…the fact that I didn’t discover something was strange. I definitely thought someone was there. There were a lot of things that bothered me.”

“……”

“What bothered me the most was the ‘guide.’ That meant someone else entered the hardcore route before me… I’m the only User alive who knows the shortcut; not even Lim Jisoo knows about this. However, I still couldn’t

find it–and I searched until the end. Lim Jisoo would have no reason to lie about finding it ahead of time, so I thought I might have been deluded or the scenario might have changed. But…”

As Ryu Hyerin listened to her companions’ words, she said, with a pale face, “We made certain Seo Dawon is dead, though?”

Bae Jaemin answered, a half-beat delayed, “…I couldn’t confirm his death with my eyes.”

“I confirmed it, though.”

Bae Jaemin stared at her. Ryu Hyerin perceived his suspicious gaze, so she spoke louder in a confident voice, “I saw it. I saw Koo Kyungman making holes in Seo Dawon’s corpse, and I saw Lim Jisoo melting him with hydrochloric acid! Even as I held my nausea and desire to vomit in, I distinctly saw it with my two eyes. How could he survive that? What, are those guys immortal or something?”

“……”

“And, if they survived, what have they done for these past three years? No way–your dream is truly nonsense this time.”

Bae Jaemin didn’t contradict her. However, soon, he muttered something they had been desperately trying to ignore, “…But, it is creepy how well Park Hoseok’s murderer imitated Jung Garam. It’s as if… that person knows everything.”

“……”

“Ryu Hyerin, don’t deny that you also feel uncomfortable about that.”

“It’s only a speculation.”

“No, actually, I should have noticed something was off when Koo Kyungman was dealt with: Koo Hui-seo. You probably wouldn’t know anything about this, but that man wasn’t in a state to leave the hospital on his own. He wasn’t even alive.” Bae Jaemin had not told Ryu Hyerin that he

had fulfilled a secret commission for Koo Kyungman in order to secure the guildmaster's cooperation. Of course, she vaguely knew the two had some sort of agreement, but she wasn't too curious about the details.

From the moment Koo Kyungman saw Ryu Hyerin, he was like a tiger, stalking its prey…flirting and waiting for the opportunity to snatch her away. [1] They were only able to disappoint him by showing that Ryu Hyerin and Bae Jaemin were in a deep relationship; otherwise, he may have done something truly disgusting.

Therefore, Ryu Hyerin wasn't happy about cooperating with Koo Kyungman, but, without his help, they would have suffered a huge setback in their efforts to manipulate the evidence after their misdeed. So, she left all dealings with Koo Kyungman to her partner. Bae Jaemin was aware of her attitude, so Ryu Hyerin didn't think Bae Jaemin was intentionally hiding information from her.

She asked, lowering her voice, "What did you do for Koo Kyungman?"

After a short silence, Bae Jaemin replied, "He said he'd cooperate with us after I killed Koo Hui-seo."

Something came to mind when she heard the name Koo Hui-seo, "That man… Didn't you say he was under some curse?"

"That's right. A curse that rendered it impossible to wound him."

"Then, how did you kill him?"

"…Koo Kyungman said that he can delay the curse's effects." Bae Jaemin grimaced. "Originally, the curse was supposed to instantaneously activate when you hurt him, but you can extend that time with a specific item. For example, if the curse comes into effect 150 years later, it won't matter–I'll be dead by then."

"There's an item that can delay the effects for that long?"

“It’s possible if you use [Beatrice’s Prayer]. However…that didn’t fall into my hands back then.” [2]

Ryu Hyerin frowned as she recalled who the first owner of [Beatrice’s Prayer] was.

———

TL: Sorry guys, when I said we’ll be returning from our flashback, I think a couple of ya’ll thought we were returning to Choi Lee-kyung. But soon! We’ve just got a little more to go.

And!!! I’m officially COVID negative today whooot!!!

Footnotes

1. , a literary term that was popularized into common slang. Literally “on the lookout for, like a tiger searching for prey. Where prey is a ‘taken’ romantic interest.
2. Omg, that’s why he wanted it so much O.O

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“That’s…something Jung Garam took, right?”

Bae Jaemin nodded. “So, in the end, that plan didn’t work out. Which is why I suggested we simply lock Koo Hui-seo up. Koo Kyungman… was half insane by that time as well.”

Since Ryu Hyerin had only known Koo Kyungman through the greasy glint in his eye, it was hard to imagine the ex-guild leader being nervously irrational.

However, Bae Jaemin sighed deeply as he reminisced on his memories, “He was strangely afraid of his brother.”

“He was?”

“Yeah. I think he said that his brother had almost stabbed him to death? I’ve met Koo Hui-seo a few times since that supposed incident, but from my perspective, Koo Hui-seo seemed to have a lot of affection for his brother… I couldn’t quite understand.”

“But?”

“As far as Koo Kyungman was concerned… Koo Hui-seo’s head is a bit like this–” After saying that, Bae Jaemin made circles with his index finger next to his head.

Ryu Hyerin frowned, “Koo Kyungman has a few screws missing too, though.”

“That’s true, but… In any case, because Koo Kyungman commissioned me to kill Koo Hui-seo, my situation became a bit precarious after I was unable to get my hands on Beatrice.”

“…I’m sure he threw a fuss.”

“Don’t even speak about it. He threw a temper tantrum–any childish tactics he had in his repertoire.” Bae Jaemin’s face distorted as if he were recalling the past.

Ryu Hyerin asked, “So, how did you reign Koo Kyungman in?”

“…I asked if we absolutely needed to kill his brother.”

“What?”

“I proposed we locked him up in a mental hospital. I’d provide Koo Kyungman with a diagnosis certificate.”

Ryu Hyerin blinked before inquiring, “Ah, you mean something like, ‘he had a seizing episode in a dungeon’?”

“I could forge a diagnosis like that as much as I want.” Because Priests and other healing classes were responsible for the safety and lives of the party, they had the legal authority to diagnose a party member’s condition and remove them from the dungeon before combat could break out.

In other words, if Bae Jaemin testified that Koo Hui-seo showed symptoms of insanity within the dungeon, the man could be confined in a mental hospital for a certain period of time–just as any other legal guardian could.

However, this authority was unable to work long-term; the diagnosis was only temporary. Ryu Hyerin pointed that out, “But, even so, your plan would only work for a day or two.”

“That’s true, but… But, once he’s been captured, one never knows what will happen within the hospital, right? I ordered them to lock the man up, drug him, and cut off his limbs.”

“What?” Startled, Ryu Hyerin looked at the Priest.

Perhaps flustered by the look in her eyes, he continued in an apologetic tone, “I didn’t actually command the hospital staff to cut off his limbs…I just wanted to debilitate Koo Hui-seo in a non-life-threatening way. Something like putting him in a coma for a very long time.”

“Wouldn’t the curse…stop that from happening?”

“No. It just needed to not be a threat to Koo Hui-seo’s life. The extent of the curse is clear. Furthermore… According to Koo Kyungman, certain stimuli can incite his brother to commit self-harm.”

“…But that means…”

“Right. In a twisted way, one can state that we’re not trying to ‘kill’ him, we’re trying to ‘save’ him. We’re suppressing his attempts to commit self-harm by locking him away.”

“……”

“I advised Koo Kyungman to take advantage of that loophole.”

She knew that Bae Jaemin was talented in the ways of trickery, but she was utterly surprised by this straightforward and easily accomplishable way to circumvent the curse. Even though Koo Hui-seo was cursed to block any killing attacks, that man was captured and trapped in the hospital for over three years.

Just as Ryu Hyerin wondered if Koo Kyungman had actually followed through with the threat to cut off his brother’s limbs, she recalled a recent picture of Koo Hui-seo that had been circulating around.

‘Seeing as how he’s walking around properly…Koo Kyungman must have simply placed him in a coma. Koo Hui-seo is Koo Kyungman’s older

brother after all.’

Bae Jaemin must have had a similar thought. Adopting a surprised expression, he also exclaimed, “I also thought Koo Kyungman acted more moderately than I expected… Koo Hui-seo looked alright in his latest photo.”

Ryu Hyerin, listening to her partner thus far, called out to the Priest after a passing thought flashed through her mind. “Wait a minute.”

“What is it?”

“Then…if Koo Kyungman were to be tortured and interrogated before his death, wouldn’t this–the matter of Koo Hui-seo’s hospitalization–also leak out?”

“…There’s a high possibility, yes.”

“No, then… Won’t Koo Hui-seo target you for murder?”

Bae Jaemin’s expression became even more downcast, “That’s the problem.”

Only then did Ryu Hyerin fully understand the reason why Bae Jaemin was so anxious. If Koo Kyungman had confessed to the incident behind [Red Lotus]’s downfall, then there was no way Koo Hui-seo wouldn’t know about Bae Jaemin’s involvement in the man’s imprisonment.

No matter how fine the man looks on the outside, Koo Hui-seo had been locked up in the hospital for three years. His mind couldn’t possibly be stable…

‘Koo Kyungman probably made sure to keep up appearances and keep his hyung physically intact–the ex-guild leader was sure to have done something to his brother. That’s why he died so soon…’

Ryu Hyerin clicked her tongue. “I suppose we’ll have to abandon all thought of attracting Koo Hui-seo to our side or negotiating with him.”

“…That’s right. Right now, I won’t be able to believe Koo Hui-seo even if he were to extend an olive branch.”

“Then, what’ll you do? Do you think Koo Hui-seo is the one behind everything? Will you focus your efforts on uncovering his weaknesses?”

“I’m not too sure he’s the only one–that’s the problem.”

“What?”

Bae Jaemin did not answer and, instead, rubbed at his temples for a while. What Ryu Hyerin had just voiced was something that he agonized over for a while. Bae Jaemin continued to talk, adopting a pained expression that conveyed a killer headache, “There’s a person that Koo Hui-seo persistently met, after leaving the hospital… Choi Lee-Kyung.”

“Choi Lee-Kyung?” Ryu Hyerin groped through her memories to try and match the unfamiliar name to a face.

However, Bae Jaemin dissuaded her efforts, “You wouldn’t know him. He’s not a User you’d take note of.”

“Who is he?”

“He’s a Necromancer… and a low-level one at that.”

“Necromancer? What’s that?”

“It’s a class. They summon skeletons or something.”

“Ah…?” Ryu Hyerin was a little dubious–this was the first time she’d heard of this class.

However, Bae Jaemin adopted a complicated expression–was that a smirk or a cringe? “That’s why this all makes no sense.”

“What makes no sense?”

“Choi Lee-Kyung being Jung Garam. Honestly, he’s someone that never had any contact on [Red Lotus] nor does he have the ability to kill Park Hoseok.”

Ryu Hyerin furrowed her brows and asked, “What’s his level?”

“He hasn’t even entered 4 digits yet.”

“…Does he have any special items we might not know about?”

“Even if all of Choi Lee-Kyung’s abilities were augmented with L-class [1] items, he wouldn’t be able to touch a hair on Park Hoseok’s head. Besides, he isn’t really a martial attacker or a close-combat class.”

“……”

“It’s definitely not him. It’s not him, but… I still don’t understand why Koo Hui-seo keeps meeting Choi Lee-Kyung. Is Koo Hui-seo meeting someone else too? Are our sentries simply missing another of his contacts? Then, what method is he using to be able to meet with those that may be connected with the [Red Lotus]. If we can just uncover that line of contact, we would be able to plan a surprise attack…” Bae Jaemin shook his head.

After hearing his explanation, Ryu Hyerin felt the situation was even more strange. “Hey… What’s so strange about your doubts?”

“Hm? What did you say?”

“That person… How is he meeting Koo Hui-seo? How did he become close to Koo Hui-seo?”

“Huh?” Bae Jaemin blinked before frowning. Perhaps he thought that Ryu Hyerin didn’t believe him, he pouted and grumbled, “I mean… Even if he’s suspicious, he’s not really capable of anything. I’ve already investigated everything.”

“No! You idiot! How can a person with no particular talent hang around Koo Hui-seo? Do you think the current guildmaster of the Red Dragon is an

ordinary person or something? You think just anyone can meet with him? Don’t you know that any sentries–any of our people–we placed within his home exited in a body bag? All of his bodyguards are legendary class Users. Then, how did Choi Lee-Kyung get to know him…enough to regularly spend time with him?”

Bae Jaemin looked at his partner for a while before answering in a slightly discomfited tone, “They’re probably…*special* friends.”

“What?” Ryu Hyerin was startled by the unexpected response and looked back through her memories again. That person was called ‘Lee-Kyung,’ right? “Is Choi Lee-Kyung a woman? I thought you said he was a man.” [2]

“You’re right; he’s a man.”

“Hah?’

“Bae Jaemin recalled Choi Lee-Kyung’s appearance.

At first, more than any specifics about the Necromancer’s looks, Choi Lee-Kyung felt somehow familiar… Then, during the conversation, the way the Necromancer withdrew at every touch and advance stimulated and excited his sadism.

That’s why Bae Jaemin didn’t really find it weird to hear that Koo Hui-seo sent the Necromancer a flower bouquet (nor did he question his own actions when the Priest himself secretly sent a watchdog to observe the Necromancer). Bae Jaemin didn’t really consider those a big deal.

However, this matter wasn’t something he could explain to a bewildered Ryu Hyerin, so he simply shrugged his shoulders, “I suppose that’s the ‘mental illness’ that Koo Kyungman was referring to.”

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TL: Multiple things here:

a) ???Excuse me? Priests just have the leeway to forcibly admit someone to a mental hospital? That's so mind boggling?

b) Another reason to hate Bae Jaemin: Being gay/bi isn't a mental illness):

Footnotes

1. Legendary class
2. Korean has very little pronouns in written or spoken language. Thus, it's very easy for Ryu Hyerin to mistake Lee-Kyung's gender. In fact, that's why I have a hard time guessing whether or not someone is a man or woman when translating T_T At least until context clues happen.

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Chapter 279

Chapter 279

Ryu Hyerin was a little flustered to hear that Choi Lee-kyung was gay, but she soon shook her head and said, “Honestly, what are you saying right now?”

“What?”

“Do you really think they’re just sleeping together?”

“I’m just putting forth this hypothesis because Choi Lee-kyung has no ability or talent for the other option.” It wasn’t that Bae Jaemin didn’t suspect the Necromancer, but the power gap was just too convincing.

Rather than coming up with a new hypothesis and substituting Choi Lee-kyung as the missing link, it was more reasonable to dismiss the low-level User as someone personally connected to Koo Hui-seo. The suspect was probably someone else Koo Hui-seo met with stealthily.

However, Ryu Hyerin didn’t back down. “Then you should check who else Choi Lee-kyung is meeting.”

Bae Jaemin, who sighed as if he were resigned to continue this conversation, said bluntly, “I’ve already investigated everything.”

“So? What are your conclusions?”

“Besides Koo Hui-seo…He also knows Moon Issak. But…”

“What?!” Ryu Hyerin stared at Bae Jaemin as if she were looking at a madman.

Before she could talk more, he dissuaded her, “Please calm down. It seems like he was under Moon Issak for a short while before he transferred to Koo Hui-seo.”

“What…? You crazy–Is Moon Issak gay too?” Ryu Hyerin looked at Bae Jaemin as if he was out of his mind.

His neck flushed, “No! That’s not what I’m saying… Moon Issak sometimes extorts evil-attribute users and have them make sales for him.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. But that’s… Frankly, that man can’t make these sorts of sales under his name. He’s a public official–on the surface–after all.”

Ryu Hyerin tilted her head as she thought about Moon Issak who persistently wore DAA’s new product line every time the equipment was released. “Is he that lacking for money even though he’s ripped you off for millions by now?”

Moon Issak never hesitated to receive money. The guild masters who had to deal with him every year ground their teeth and wondered who was truly the ‘evil’ one.

Bae Jaemin smiled bitterly. “Well… I can’t really use the items that evil-attribute Users use anyway, so there’s little loss on our side. But, think about it. Who would buy items sold by Moon Issak? Even if it were something the man couldn’t use, no one would buy it. They’d think it was bait.”

Ryu Hyerin nodded, convinced by that explanation. “So, Choi Lee-kyung sold the objects instead? Then, how did he and Moon Issak form that sort of partnership?”

“I don’t think Moon Issak and Choi Lee-Kyung met directly. Kim Sangyoon connects those two.”

“Kim Sangyoon?” As she groped through her memories, searching for the familiar name, Ryu Hyerin remembered a man with vividly red hair. Isn’t he that large warrior who once wanted to join [HaHae] guild? “Ah, Kim Sangyoon… Then, what’s the relationship between Kim Sangyoon and Choi Lee-kyung?”

Bae Jaemin replied with a smirk. “This is truly mind-boggling. Choi Lee-kyung became his acquaintance by asking the Warrior to carry him through the [Tower of Command] in order to obtain one ingredient.”

“……”

“Now do you understand why Choi Lee-kyung isn’t the culprit? That’s the level he’s at.”

“……” Ryu Hyerin felt uncomfortable with something, but she had nothing more to say since she had seen Users be carried in other parties as well. All those who were carried had poor skills and were quite sloppy; they had to show a servile attitude and bow to their clients.

While she was relieved to hear that Choi Lee-kyung was only at that level, she was still uncomfortable with something…though she didn’t yet know how to express herself. However, Ryu Hyerin decided to follow Bae Jaemin’s judgment for now. Then, a plan fluttered through her brain; she asked him, “Then, why didn’t you kidnap or coax Choi Lee-kyung to use him against Koo Hui-seo?”

“…Ah, that’s right. I was going to do that, but I forgot about it for a while due to Moon Issak’s tantrums.”

“Are you an idiot?” Though she fired back her retort immediately, she agreed inwardly that the Priest had no time to worry about Choi Lee-kyung while Moon Issak was digging into the origins of [Beatrice].

Moon Issak had the genius ability to, when he had hooked onto someone or something, dig deep into his target without being dissuaded and turning the entire situation into a mess. He became the youngest secretary of the

User’s Association because he persistently dug into a murder case that was committed by a User sponsored by the association.

Furthermore, not much was known about Moon Issak’s abilities. Most of the people who confronted him died.

A mysterious force and the ability to act without hesitation… In addition, he had no weaknesses to restrain him as he had no family, relatives, lover, or guild.

That’s why even the best guild executives couldn’t afford to touch Moon Issak. When one runs an organization, they are bound to commit shady acts–whether big or small. If they were to mess with Moon Issak and he were to discover such morally ambiguous activies…the damage would be out of control.

A long time ago, large-scale guilds tried to dig into the association’s loophsoles and make profit as the [Red Lotus] guild did, but the situation had changed significantly from that era. That’s because the snake-like chairman [Note: I can’t fix this footnote, so have the awkward image of the

specific snake Ryu Hyerin is referencing (the red-banded snake) here.] of the Korean User's Association used Moon Issak like a sword.

The chairman was incredibly wary of the possibility of large guilds joining forces to enact their desires. Perhaps because of his military background, he was a conservative who believed that Users should follow the government's instructions. Therefore, Moon Issak was protected politically by the Association's chairman.

Because of that background, Bae Jaemin of course sent millions of 'donations' to Moon Issak as a formality. On the surface, the donations were provided to the pseudo-religion that Moon Issak believed in; honestly, Ryu Hyerin felt like that was such a waste of money. She'd rather throw the money in the trash rather than use it for some futile, useless bribe.

Moreover, Ryu Hyerin didn't like how he looked at her every time she encountered him. His tenacious gaze–his eyes focused on her–until she turned away…Though the feeling was quite different from Koo Kyungman, she still felt uncomfortable. It wasn't like he was sexually harassing her. But, as someone who had a lot to hide, being observed was a source of great stress for her.

'That man honestly has a horrible aura… Plus, there's a rumor going around that he's [immortal].'

There were many rumors she had heard in passing. Ryu Hyerin frowned while reflecting on those thoughts.

'A man that doesn't die… As expected, I feel bad about this.' Among the abilities that defy worldly logic, [immortality] was truly the worst. How could something like that be attached to something of the 'holy' attribute? Rather, that seemed more like a trait for the undead.

'The undead…'

Ryu Hyerin smiled quietly to herself; she was pleased with her wit.

Holy attribute Users would feel as if an unpleasant smell was wafting around after seeing the undead–something clearly aligned with ‘evil.’ They would want to remove its presence immediately.

Therefore, that word suited Moon Issak very well; she felt utterly bad whenever he appeared. Though, if that man knew that she thought of him as an undead, that man would run wild. The resulting mental image naturally made the smile on her face wider.

No matter how formally Moon Issak speaks, how gentle he pretends to be, or how he may wear glasses…the man’s temperate image was merely an illusion that his high-handed eyes would break. Shouldn’t he be more careful about looking at others with those eyes? Ryu Hyerin intended to fully cooperate if there was an opportunity to deal with him someday. There was no way she was the only one who felt this way.

‘I want to bury his eyeballs.’

Then, as she thought that, Choi Lee-kyung was brought to the forefront of her mind again.

‘Undead and Necromancer? Well… I suppose they suit each other.’

Birds of a feather flock together, after all.

Ryu Hyerin recalled the latest thing she had heard before she arrived here and said, “About Choi Lee-kyung. If he’s that close to Koo Hui-seo, then that person must know something about him, right?”

“Probably.”

“Then, how about dragging Koo Hui-seo to the negotiating table using Choi Lee-kyung?”

“It’s a little too much to mess with him recklessly. We have no idea what Koo Hui-seo has prepared.”

“I’m just asking you to invite Choi Lee-kyung somewhere and observe the situation. And, I have some pretty high-class information.”

“What is it?”

“Koo Hui-seo was hospitalized yesterday–he’s unconscious.”

“What?” Bae Jaemin’s eyes opened wide.

Satisfied with his response, Ryu Hyerin smiled, “Right? It’s solid information too. The rear boat [1] protecting Choi Lee-kyung has been temporarily rendered incapable.”

“……”

“It’s nothing life-threatening, but still, he probably wouldn’t be able to leave the hospital for a few days?”

At her continued explanation, Bae Jaemin’s expression became contemplative. Ryu Hyerin leaned on Bae Jaemin’s shoulder. Then, instead of grabbing his hand, she picked up the phone and brought the receiver up to his face. “If not now, there might not be any more opportunities to call out Choi Lee-kyung.”

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: And now we get to the present: Ryu Hyerin was the mastermind behind calling Choi Lee-kyung out!

Though, tbh, I expected this to happen. Koo Hui-seo is too high-profile for someone to not get suspicious.

Footnotes

1. Referencing, ofc, military naval tactics. A small scout boat is Choi Lee-kyung, and Koo Hui-seo is the war ship protecting him

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Chapter 280

Chapter 280

“That phone call right now, it was from Bae Jaemin?”

As soon as I cut off contact with the Priest, Seo Dawon suddenly appeared carrying a filthy Lackey.

The problem, though, was that I wasn’t alone in the hospital room. Kim Sangyoon was surprised by Lackey’s sudden appearance; he clamped his mouth shut and retreated a few steps. No wonder–he must be scared since he can’t see Seo Dawon with his eyes.

“S-Seo Dawon-nim… Is he here?” The warrior asked me.

“Yes?” However, I was left surprised this time.

Kim Sangyoon looked into the empty air with a wary expression, but he seemed confident that Seo Dawon was present. I asked Seo Dawon a question silently with my eyes about what was happening, but, instead of answering, the Mage lightly flicked his finger.

Poof–!

“Argh!” Kim Sangyoon sat down, startled, as he exclaimed out loud; the warrior sounded a bit like a ball that was losing air. “I-I’m leaving!” He shouted as he rose to his feet, lightning quick, and ran out of the hospital room.

I was left staring at the door with an incredulous feeling.

“It seems his nose has gotten a bit better,” the Mage commented.

“Huh?”

“I’m talking about Sangyoon-ie. Anyway, that’s that. I asked if it was Bae Jaemin that just called.”

“…Yeah. He referred to the Jeju Island incident… It felt like he was fishing for information.” As I responded, I felt a hard touch on my knee; I lifted Lackey and hugged it in my arms. My waist felt a little stiff at that movement, but I could endure that sort of pain. Lackey, who had been all tearful as it clung to my feet, rubbed its face into my arms as soon as I picked it up.

However, I smelt a–until now–burnt scent I had never smelt before on the skeleton. I was curious, but I thought I should finish dealing with the Bae Jaemin matter first.

Seo Dawon looked at me hugging the skeleton before speaking in a tired tone, “I suppose, even if Jaemin was unintelligent, you were involved in every big event… It was inevitable that you’d be suspected sooner or later.”

“……”

“Then… I suppose we’ll need to buy some time.” Then, Seo Dawon plopped onto my bed and began writing an email something on the laptop that he had left in the hospital room. Then, turning the screen towards me, he requested that I contact an unfamiliar number. “Call this number here.”

“Huh? Yeah…”

The cell phone I received from him was already ringing. And, not long after, an unfamiliar woman answered the phone.

–Who are you to contact me through this number?

On the laptop screen, Seo Dawon wrote to me, ‘I sent the account book that Geum Miyoung had written to your previous email account.’

I read exactly what was written, in a nervous voice, to the stranger. “I’ve sent the account book that Geum Miyoung had written…to your previous

email account.” [1]

–…Who are you, really?

The woman’s voice turned stormy.

“Hang up, Lee-kyung-ah.”

I hung up in a hurry; as soon as I hung up, I kept getting calls from the number I just called. However, Seo Dawon placed the cell phone back into his personal inventory, and the hospital room became tranquil again.

I folded my arms, silently asking the Mage to explain.

Seo Dawon docilely opened his mouth. “Do you remember? A long time ago? Lim Jisoo’s younger brother?”

“What? Ah….”

“That was the person who helped me back then.”

“What exactly does that person do?”

“She’s a prosecutor. She has enough talent that it’s a pity she’s not a User.”

I recalled the woman’s voice and glanced at the Mage momentarily. Was she perhaps his ex-girlfriend? It can’t be, right? However, Seo Dawon immediately guessed my thoughts after looking at my expression. He giggled and smiled, “No. Besides, didn’t we both decide to leave our pasts behind?”

Though I felt relief at his rebuttal, I felt his statement about leaving our pasts behind a little too much. Temper flaring, I retorted, “Don’t be ridiculous. You may have a lot to leave behind, but I don’t.”

Perhaps I wouldn’t feel this way if I had at least dated one other person. However, Seo Dawon listened to me with a strange expression. Straight

away, he asked, “Really? Then why did you mumble Han Kiseok’s name in your sleep?”

“What?!”

“I heard it not long after we began our contract. And, afterwards, you often mumbled his name in your sleep.”

“No..!”

“That’s why I thought you two had an extremely intimate relationship.”

Never in my wildest dreams did I expect the Mage to be under this delusion. Face flushed, I rambled and made excuses, “Wh-What are you saying?! Honestly, haven’t I said that Han Kiseok didn’t like me… Besides, he’s no longer recognizing me on social media. It says he unfollowed me… Really…I’ve said many times that he and I had no relationship, but how long will you latch onto this delusion?!”

As I spoke I cringed as I remembered a previous reckless incident, but… In any case, that wasn’t anything comparable to what Seo Dawon had imagined, so I was determined to correct his misunderstanding.

Seo Dawon nodded at my desperate excuse. “Alright, Lee-kyung-ah. I’ll apologize to you.”

“…Th-Thank you…?” However, when I thought about it again, I felt a bit cheated.

I glared at him immediately, but, rather than being intimidated, Seo Dawon approached me with a grin. However, before he reached me, Lackey wriggled up to my shoulder.

[Clack Clack.]

[I love you so much.]

Then, the skeleton rubbed its cheek against mine. I stroked its cheek, savoring the Mage’s annoyed expression.

Immediately, Seo Dawon crossed his arms, “I think Lackey is too stupid. I thought its brain might be as intelligent as a chimera’s, but…”

“Don’t say such horrible things.” To protect the skeleton from Seo Dawon’s sullen gaze, I sat on the bed again and stared at him. Then, I re-visited our prior topic. “So, what sort of data did you send?”

“Geum Miyoung?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, things about her double ledgers, of course.” [2] The Mage said, as if it were obvious. Apparently, they had barely managed to find Geum Miyoung’s weak point.

However, I still didn’t know what all this had to do with Bae Jaemin’s phone call and our appointment tomorrow. I asked about it, “Geum Miyoung’s double ledger…No way, does it implicate [HaHae]?”

“No. I put everything *except* for [HaHae] in that document. [Virtuoso, [Opera]…even [Red Dragon].”

As soon as I heard that, I realized what he meant–how his plan would put Bae Jaemin in trouble.

However…

“Even [Red Dragon]?”

“Just one more criminal charge to add to Koo Kyungman’s list.”

“……”

Fortunately, there seemed to be a way for Koo Hui-seo to escape the fallout. When I looked a little relieved, Seo Dawon immediately sarcastically remarked, “Why? Are you worried something will happen to Koo Hui-seo?”

“He’s our cash cow, after all.”

“Hmmm…”

Well…To be frank, that wasn’t the only reason for my relief. Fortunately, though, the mage didn’t question me further.

After watching me fidget, Seo Dawon finally got to the main point. “I didn’t only send my ‘suspicions’ to the prosecutor; I tipped off mass media as well. I attached solid evidence of the double ledger to the email.”

“What?”

“To be exact, I informed the press that a prosecutor was investigating this case. Furthermore, I stated that they’ve received this scoop before the guild masters of all the large-scale guild masters. They could negotiate manuscript fees in advance…before this matter makes it to the front page of the news.”

“Then…”

“It’s safe to say that there won’t be a single large-scale guild executive who hasn’t heard about this by tomorrow morning.”

That meant, starting tonight, Bae Jaemin would be so busy he wouldn’t be able to pay attention to anything else. Seo Dawon smiled at my expression. Then, he dropped another bomb. “That’s why… We’ll have to kidnap Geum Miyoung by tomorrow morning.”

“What?!” I was startled, but I suppose Geum Miyoung was one of our revenge targets anyway. But, it was another matter to consider kidnapping her while we’re being so publically scrutinized.

However, Seo Dawon had already set up a trap for Geum Miyoung. “I’m sure she’s heard the news too. The guild executives are sure to contact her and make a giant fuss. They’ll try to stealthily meet her tonight.”

“That’s…”

As the double ledger scandal was on the verge of bursting out to the public, the media would soon contact those involved; since Geum Miyoung

was in charge of the finances, the guilds were sure to interrogate her. They were bound–within the same boat–like those from the [Tower of Command] incident. Then, Geum Miyoung was sure to have been transported to a specified place.

Then, Seo Dawon informed me that Geun Miyoung was currently staying in an exclusive, gated neighborhood. Therefore, there was only one road leading in or out. “Furthermore, you have to pass through a tunnel to reach the hub’s downtown.”

When I heard his explanation, I wondered, “Can’t people just Warp or Teleport there?”

“Executives won’t gather at places that allow for Warping or Teleportation. That’s a perfect recipe for assassination attempts, after all.”

Hearing that, I thought about possibly finding and raiding their gathering location. However, my current capacity only allows me to summon one servant; it would be too much to sweep all those Users away with only one servant.

Seo Dawon nodded, “Frankly, it would be best to try and knock them all out at once. Well, at least Geum Miyoung would make a good hunting target.”

“Really?”

“First, we should rob the slush fund. After all, warehouse managers are known to make as much money as the businessmen that own the warehouse contents,” Seo Dawon said, smiling coldly.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: WE’RE BACK AGAIN~~~

I’ll try to update faster but, I’ve just recovered from Covid and am quite busy >.<
I’ll soon be freer though! The first rounds of my application are due December, so Soon!!!

Footnotes

1. Note: Choi Lee-kyung is speaking formally here while Seo Dawon was being informal in his written instructions.
2. (double ledger). Aka a false or hidden account used for tax evasion.

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Chapter 281

Chapter 281

“I’m also in the middle of an investigation, myself. There are no signs of outside intrusion into the server… Yes. I’ll explain in detail when I arrive.” Geum Miyoung had to respond to each phone call that kept persistently coming even as she rode in the limousine. She hung up and clutched her throbbing head. Of course, as soon as she did that, her phone rang again three seconds later, but she was at her limit. She placed her phone into her inventory.

“Who did this…” Profiles of people who could betray her in the company floated around her brain. ‘Han Jung-eun? ….No. They’re definitely capable of this, but this isn’t their modus operandi… Then, Director Kim? She’s supposed to go to Singapore in a month, though…”

However, no matter how hard Geum Miyoung wracked her brain, she couldn’t identify the culprit. Moreover, she couldn’t even go to work because of the exhausting reporters that had swarmed from the bait–the scoops–that had been spread around her.

Eventually, Geum Miyoung locked herself in the mansion while fending off the calls and complaints from customers who were essentially cursing and insulting her. However, she had been dragged out by this summons. She frantically expended all her stamina into deducing who had exposed all her scandals.

Because the inability to identify the culprit would end in her death, Geum Miyoung continued to think of profiles of various directors within

the company and prepared answers to possible questions that may be asked.

‘First, I’ll need to find a congressman who can pressure the prosecution… I’ll need to find someone with high authority–someone who can cut off any investigations…’

However, she couldn’t continue her thoughts; her driver suddenly stomped on the brakes.

Screeeeech–!

“W-What’s going on?!” Geum Miyoung’s startled eyes opened wide. This had never happened in the two years since she had hired this chauffeur.

However, the driver didn’t say anything; Geum Miyoung anxiously pressed the button to open the separating screen, which was usually raised.

“What….?”

There was no one in the driver’s seat. Goosebumps raised all over her arms; she exited the car.

She dismounted onto a road in the middle of a tunnel, lit by orange lights. She stood on the lonely road, wary of her surroundings, but she couldn’t sense any signs of life.

She lived in a mansion located quite far from the Hub’s center, and this road was not often traveled. Geum Miyoung approached the driver’s seat carefully and looked inside. Terrifyingly, except for the open door, there were no traces left behind.

“…Who is it?” Geum Miyoung took out [Carmen], a weapon that she hadn’t used in a long while, from her inventory.

To be frank, as a User who wasn’t all that interested in dungeoneering or leveling, she had horrible fighting skills. However, she had commissioned [Carmen], a violin, paying a large sum of money to Master Blacksmith Lee Dojin; the weapon was Lee Dojin’s masterpiece when it comes to the User’s safety.

Just holding [Carmen] brought stability to her mind and body; after all, having the violin on hand would create a shield that could resist magic that was class 6 or below; delusions and curses would have their efficiency reduced by 30 percent.

However, as soon as she took out her weapon, she heard a husky voice behind her. “It would have been better for you to take out your phone instead.”

“Who are you!” Geum Miyoung thought the sneering voice was somehow familiar, but no face came to mind. Nevertheless, from the moment she heard that voice, she trembled; it felt as if some ancient, buried memory was slowly awakening.

Geum Miyoung placed her chin on [Carmen]’s chinrest to shake off the tension that squeezed her heart. And, when she raised the strings and fingerboard high…

“You forgot about me?”

She heard someone whispering into her ear. Startled, Geum Miyoung failed her first scale and instead made a discordant squeaking sound.

Then, when she turned her head in the voice’s direction–

[Graaaaaghhh–!]

The Chaueffeur, complete with his head split in half, appeared and jumped at her.

[The Shield is activating.]

[Gragghhh!]

Boom–! Thud–!

Fortunately, due to [Carmen]’s passive effect, the driver struggled to break through the translucent screen that appeared in front of Geum Miyoung’s nose; however, she was already panicking.

“W-What…?” She faltered before running away from the oncoming driver.

However, she couldn’t run for long. While she frantically retreated, the lights in the tunnel slowly began to extinguish, one by one, starting from the lights closest to her exit route.

Poof– Poof–

Between the sounds of the fuses exploding and the shadow falling upon her, Geum Miyoung realized that someone was running towards her.

She was conflicted, stuck between the driver chasing her with its floundering body and an unidentified person, who was running at a fierce speed. But, she continued to place her faith in her violin.

‘Even if they run into me…!’

She clenched her teeth and tightened her grip on [Carmen].

However…

“[Rho-Aias].” The runner whispered and stretched one arm out; a shield shaped like an inverted triangle materialized on her arm. After witnessing the person’s silhouette, Geum Miyoung’s face paled. She instinctively tried to deny what she saw. “N-No way! Impossible…!”

“[Dash].”

Bang–!

[Carmen]’s shield shattered to pieces in one blow. The shield did not stop there; it hit Geum Miyoung across the face. Geum Miyoung rolled across the floor, suffering terrible pain. “Aaaack!”

“Do you remember me now?”

Geum Miyoung opened her eyes wide–unable to believe what she had seen despite vomiting blood from her nose and mouth. Her shock was greater than her pain. She shook her hands and head in denial, “No– hnngh… It can’t be… Ackk!”

Her opponent slowly approached Geum Miyoung, who struggled and made great efforts to retreat. The accountant tried to push her body backwards with her hands, crawling along the floor, but the back of her head eventually met the cold wall of the tunnel.

“……”

“Hnngh–Hnrrk… Cough…” Illuminated by the sole light remaining in the tunnel, Geum Miyoung met ‘that person’s eyes.

She thought she might be suffering from a terrible nightmare. Blood bubbles dribbling down from her mouth, she muttered in a frenzy, “B-But she died…”

“……”

“I-Impossible…”

However, as time passed, her pain served as a reminder that this wasn’t a dream; she could not shake off the long arm that reached out to her. Geum Miyoung thought she’d rather faint. So, she closed her eyes before the hand touched her body, but…

Crrunnch–!

“Arrrrgh!”

“It seems you lack basic conversational manners.” As soon as Geum Miyoung closed her eyes, Kim Olim drove her shield through Geum Miyoung’s left index finger into the ground, amputating the accountant’s digit.

In extreme pain, Geum Miyoung opened her eyes and, in her writhing, hit the back of her head against the tunnel wall. However, when she saw Kim Olim raise the shield again, Geum Miyoung could only release a groan, no longer able to wriggle about. Her fear tamped down her pain.

However, that frozen moment lasted for just a few seconds. Geum Miyoung quickly crawled towards the Paladin's feet, clutched onto her ankles, and begged, "I-It's not me. I'm not… Someone…Someone else…! I can…tell you who did it! I was threatened! P-Please…"

"……"

"I'll do anything if you spare me! Anything! I'll tell you everyone who was involved!" Recalling Kim Olim's gentle personality in the past, Geum Miyoung rubbed her blood-stained face on the Paladin's boots. The accountant hoped that somehow she could make it through this ordeal.

However, Kim Olim didn't respond; the Paladin neither criticized nor questioned the accountant. Geum Miyoung looked up cautiously because she couldn't comprehend what that extended silence meant.

After meeting the Paladin's gaze face-on, though, she couldn't move one inch.

Kim Olim looked down at Geum Miyoung as if some bothersome trash had been dumped on her foot. The look in her eyes–the way she regarded the accountant as something worthless or the way in which the Paladin looked vaguely curious at how far the accountant would go to beg for her life–shattered Geum Miyoung's shallow hopes.

"You're going to die, Geum Miyoung." Maintaining eye contact, Kim Olim declared, as if this were a foregone conclusion.

"……" Geum Miyoung felt as if her hands and feet froze.

However, Kim Olim did not end there, "However, if you answer my questions docilely, I'll give you a quick death."

“……”

“That’s the only mercy you can hope for.”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Omg, as a violinist, I want a kickass violin weapon.

Also, Kim Olim~ She’s 100% boss lady. I got shivers at the end >.<

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Chapter 282

Chapter 282

I flinched momentarily when I, from outside the tunnel, heard a deafening boom. Then Garam, who was sitting on top of the van, jumped down and approached me. “What is it, you cold?”

“N-No.”

“Do you want to drink hot cocoa?”

“…Thanks.”

The hot cocoa that Garam took out of his inventory was both warm and sweet. Perhaps too sweet–the taste was at odds with what I knew was happening inside that tunnel.

I took my lips off the cup; my heart was filled with too much anxiety. I stared continuously into the black tunnel, whose contents were hidden from my eyes.

After noticing my persistent gaze, Garam said, “Are you like that because of Lackey?”

“N-No…”

“Then, why are you so nervous?”

Perhaps he was asking if I was doubting Kim Olim’s competence; I waved my hands hurriedly and responded, “It’s not that I’m worried…”

“Are you curious?”

“Well…”

Sure, that also factored into my interest.

As I talked with Jung Garam, the entrance to the tunnel shook; Kim Olim’s figure slowly emerged. She was as clean as she was when she first entered the tunnel.

“Y-You’re done?” I stepped forward and asked.

Before the Paladin could answer, the wind changed direction and a fishy scent wafted from her. Kim Olim smirked at my paling expression. “Don’t come closer–listen to me from there.”

“…Alright.”

“First, I’ve received the accounts, passwords, and contracts from Geum Miyoung. Where is Choi Kyung-sik?”

At her words, Choi Kyung-sik, who had been lying down in the van, opened his eyes wide. He rose from his seat and waved, “I’m here!”

The young Alchemist immediately exited the car and approached the Paladin. “She’s alive, right?”

“She’ll be able to last another hour.”

“Then, I’m going in.”

“I didn’t clean up before I left. Take that into consideration.”

“Haha, I’m not Choi Lee-kyung-ssi.” Choi Kyung-sik, after spouting something upsetting, winked back at me. Then, without giving me any time to retort, he entered the crack made in the tunnel entrance’s wreckage.

As planned earlier, Choi Kyung-sik had asked us to hand over ‘Geum Miyoung’ before she died, since he believed that the woman would make a

suitable first ingredient for a Homunculus. Geum Miyoung was probably… hiding now. Though, of course, her efforts wouldn't last long.

Just as I thought that, the red moon above our heads clouded over as it returned to its original, yellowish color. Furthermore, the dark shadow beneath Kim Olim's feet gradually faded. Her breathtaking presence and the bloody scent covering her body vanished alongside the shadow.

The paladin closed her eyes, enduring the scattering of her very presence–her corporeal self, before soon opening her eyes. Only her red irises remained the same.

[Clack Clack!]

[Master!]

Just then, through the tunnel entrance, Lackey peeked its head out of the rubble and began running towards me. The biggest issue wasn't the blood and hair tangled around its mouth, but…

As soon as Kim Olim noticed the skeleton, she grabbed it by the back of the neck and kept the skeleton from coming any closer. Lackey struggled for a long while, hating its restraints, but, when Kim Olim began to peel off the hair tangled in its jawbone, the skeleton remained still with its mouth wide open.

That was such a funny yet nerve-wracking sight–I approached cautiously. Kim Olim didn't say much to stop me. After taking over Lackey and its care, I asked quietly, "…How was it?"

"Are you talking about Lackey?"

"Well…"

That's part of it–I had wondered about the skeleton's performance as well…

Kim Olim stared at me with an ambiguous expression, as if she had perceived my unspoken question. "If you're worried about me, then I'd like

you to know that’s not needed.”

“… You also compare normal adult men to hamsters,” I complained.

Kim Olim smiled, showing her teeth for the first time. Then, she placed her hand on my head and stroked my hair. In an amused tone, she said, “Choi Lee-kyung. I had said that the [Red Lotus] and their revival mattered the most, but that was a lie.”

“…Really?”

“Yes. I finally understood today. I really wanted revenge.”

“……”

“Furthermore, I realized that I was lucky to have met you.”

Her words tickled the hairs on the back of my neck.

Startled by the unexpected system alert, I turned my wide eyes back to her. However, she had already taken her hand away and adopted her usual strict and solemn expression. “So, stop worrying about me. I understand your feelings, but I’m not so sentimental.”

“Alright…”

[Clack Clack Clack.]

[Please pat me.]

As the skeleton piped up, I had no choice but to embrace Lackey and return to the car.

Then, I waited there for 30 minutes as I drank hot cocoa.

Perhaps Geum Miyoung breathed her last; several overlapping messages covered my field of view.

Soon after, Choi Kyung-sik, wearing his lab gown, trudged out of the tunnel. Contrary to our high expectations, the Alchemist's expression wasn't bright. As he plodded forth, an unsatisfied expression was glued to his face. "The Homonculus was a failure."

"……"

I could only scratch at my cheek; the details were foreign to me. Choi Kyung-sik was sure to have expected my reaction, yet he mumbled out more complaints to an unknown audience. "Since we need the softness and ambulatory nature of a human body, I thought we'd need a person. So, I decided to use Miyoung-ssi… This time, as well, the homunculus only formed halfway before falling apart… Agh, seriously. So stressful."

"What's…missing… for you to be so agitated?" I asked.

Choi Kyung-sik closed his mouth momentarily and stared at me after hearing my question. However, he soon sighed and perched on the seat opposite me. "For that matter, what *_isn't_* missing in our efforts to create new life?"

"……"

"I think the gamma specimen is what went wrong. However, the XI sample conducted in the laboratory was successful, right? So, that's why I accompanied you all to listen to Geum Miyoung during this busy time. Right? But I was betrayed! I don't even know what went wrong…"

I simply sat there, drinking my cocoa, unable to understand half of what the Alchemist just spouted.

At that moment, Woo Ragi, who had been sleeping like the dead in the van's backseat (though I was unsure if he was truly sleeping), rose from his slumber at Choi Kyung-sik's loud grumbles. "Agh, so noisy."

"I haven't even explained half of the story."

'There's no one here who can understand you."

“I know, but that’s up to me, alright? You can just cover your ears and lie back down again.”

“So annoying.” Eventually, Woo Ragi childishly threw the cushion he was lying on at the Alchemist. The issue, though, was that I was stuck between the two.

After being hit in the face with a fluffy cotton cushion, I glared at the swordsman. Damn–I spilled my hot cocoa too! “You hit me on purpose, right?”

“Who told you to be so bad at dodging?”

“Be careful Woo Ragi-ssi! And Choi Lee-kyung-ssi! It would be awful if your heads become worse here!”

“You be quiet too!”

Instantly, when she saw us bickering, Kim Olim closed the van’s door and went to the driver’s seat. Jung Garam, who had been sitting on the van’s roof all this while, crawled into the passenger seat through the window as soon as the Paladin entered the car.

I threw anything at hand towards the swordsman in the back seat, but, when the car’s engine started, I sat down properly again. Of course, as soon as I settled in my seat, the swordsman threw the garbage I had thrown back at me. I looked back, tearful; this time, Kim Olim was the one to dissuade me, “I’m going to start driving. Fasten your seatbelt.”

“Woo Ragi, you’re dead when we return home…”

The swordsman snorted at my words. Furthermore, Choi Kyungsik murmured, “Is it possible to die again at this point?” Although, when the Alchemist met my eyes, he simply smiled–how loathsome.

Heart simmering with anger, I clasped Lackey to my chest.

[Clack Clack!]

[So Happy!]

As the car started, my thoughts roamed towards Seo Dawon…whose presence I especially missed today.

Become a Patron!

TL: Kim Olim I love you.

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Chapter 283

Chapter 283

Seo Dawon had been pretty busy these past few days.

Busy enough to not participate in an important job like defeating Geum Miyoung. Moreover, he recently began to stick by Kim Sangyoon's side, and today he seemed to be enacting one of his plans by calling the Warrior out separately.

"I think we'll get a decent amount done today." He answered vaguely when I asked about his recent behavior. However, he showed no signs of hiding his actions. As if he was certain I would soon see what he meant…

'…He seemed a bit…excited?'

Should I say he looked more energetic than before?

Considering how he had passingly said that 'Kim Sangyoon has some talent,' perhaps Seo Dawon enjoyed discovering and training those with potential. I suppose he **was** someone that created and nurtured a small elite team of top-rankers, whose abilities were one-of-a-kind.

After contemplating intently, I said to Kim Olim, who was behind the steering wheel, "About Kim Sangyoon-ssi."

"Hm?"

"Seo Dawon said he had talent… Do you also agree?"

Kim Olim glanced at me through the rearview mirror before nodding, judging my question to be pure curiosity. “First things first, he has a good physique.”

“Ahhh…”

“It’s perfect for a Warrior.”

I was utterly convinced by her evaluation when I recalled Kim Sangyoon’s size. Any space felt full when I was with him.

Kim Olim then explained further, pointing out aspects I was unaware of, “Warriors have to act visibly and conspicuously at the frontlines.”

“Really?”

“As it is important to keep monsters away from magic casters or healers in the rear, an eye-catching form is good. His hair color too… As a warrior, that’s a clever choice.”

“Huh… I haven’t thought that far.”

Kim Sangyoon’s red hair dominated my impression of the man; I had no idea that his red hair would be ‘eye-catching’ to not only Users but to monsters as well.

So, after thinking for a while, my mind immediately brought up Woo Ragi, who was laying in the back seat. I glanced at man out of the corner of my eye before lowering my voice to whisper to the Paladin, “Then, Woo Ragi as well… Does he dye his hair like that to attract attention?”

“Pffthahahaha!” However, Jung Garam, who had been playing games in the passenger seat, laughed hysterically without even bothering to lower his voice. Embarrassed, I shrugged, and something light flew at the back of my head.

It seemed Woo Ragi threw trash at me again. “Are you talking behind my back?”

“No? Ow, seriously! Stop throwing things at me!”

“Then why are you asking others about my hair color?”

I ignored his words with a flushed face. Even if I asked the Swordsman directly, he probably wouldn’t give me a proper answer. He’d say, “Why are you so disgusting, asking about the origins of another person’s hair color?” or “Why are you asking, you homo!”

However, I could not predict the Swordsman’s following behavior. Woo Ragi threw another piece of trash at me and smiled at my responding anger. Then, his hair was suddenly dyed black.

“Huh?!”

“Ignoramus. Don’t you know how equipment effects work?”

“What?”

“My echo blades are swords dropped by the fairy king; therefore, my hair color changes when I have it equipped. The fairy king’s childhood hair color was blonde, you know.” With that said, Woo Ragi kept his hair black for a while.

When Woo Ragi’s thin, golden hair–so fine that one might think it’d crumble if touched–turned black, the swordsman image was quite different. To my chagrin, a handsome man was still handsome no matter the hair color…

Abruptly, Choi Kyung-sik stared at me before saying something strange. “Ara? It seems that Ragi-ssi’s black hair is to your liking, Choi Lee-kyung-ssi.”

“…W-W-What are you talking about!”

“I merely asked since your face turned so red.”

As I stuttered in panic, Jung Garam now completely turned around to see me, chin tucked into his palm. Then, in a sarcastic teasing tone, he said,

“Choi Lee-kyu~~ng… I guess you like anyone with black hair?”

“I don’t!”

“Then, why can’t you look straight at Ragi-hyung?”

“I told you not to say such weird things!”

“Jung Garam. Sit straight.” At least Kim Olim was able to calm Jung Garam down; if she hadn’t, he was sure to make a mess by teasing me all day long.

However, Woo Ragi’s gaze from the back seat couldn’t easily be ignored. I sensed some movement, so I tilted my ear back to listen further; suddenly, though, I felt a cold touch on my earlobe. Right at Woo Ragi’s symbol. He prodded at my earlobe with his fingers…

“……”

“At least you have a discerning eye, Choi Lee-kyung.”

That. Was that all he had to say while prodding at my ear?

His amusement-laden voice sounded so despicable.

“Shut up…” I gritted my teeth and ground out a reply.

However, completely lacking all tact, Choi Kyung-sik was the one to answer. “Maybe, rather than that, perhaps he doesn’t look at much other than the face? Considering his affection for guild master-nim…”

“Don’t put me on the same level as Seo Dawon,” Woo Ragi muttered.

“Seo Dawon is so much more handsome than you, alright?” I retorted.

“See? In the end, you only talk about the face.”

“…Choi Lee-kyung. Don’t get too agitated and fasten your seatbelt properly,” Kim Olim warned.

Until we arrived at the location where Geum Miyoung had hidden her slush funds, I fought with all those bastards (Kim Olim excluded).

* * *

Geum Miyoung had hidden her slush funds in two different locations. A huge amount of money–in the form of bonds–was stored at a bank; the rest were stored in something like an [instant inventory].

These [instant inventories] were system spaces where items could be stored–like a User's inventory. However, unlike a normal inventory, these instant inventories were one-time use; they were often utilized to facilitate secret transactions, with no taxes paid, and were usually difficult to track.

Of course, a huge amount of the slush funds were sleeping within the banks, but we weren't able to acquire them because the money couldn't be withdrawn without identification. However, cash (or fenced items) could be easily obtained and used, as their monetary trails have already been washed away.

So, we broke into corporate housing where the 'instant inventory' was supposedly stored based on the information obtained during Geum Miyoung's confession.

"She said the safe was in the cellar."

"[Mapping]."

After exiting the call, we quickly crossed the walls of her house; after stealthily entering the mansion, we utilized Jung Garam's skill to find the hidden basement. Then, after taking out a gigantic load of potions, Choi Kyung-sik looked at me and handed me something that appeared to be an industrial mask.

"What is this?" I asked.

"I'll going to spray around a potion, but Lee-kyung-ssi can't fall asleep." With that said, Choi Kyung-sik swirled his potion around.

I could see a skull mark engraved onto the surface of the glass bottle. Lackey must have thought that potion was for it; the skeleton reached out its hands. I docilely accepted the mask that was given to me.

[Potent Drug/Pharmaceutical Resistance Mask]

Type: Mask
Durability: 1
Equipment Restriction Level: 100
Special Skills: Cure +10

Description:
A good mask to wear during various drug experiments. It is an essential item for alchemists.

When I wore the mask, my face was completely covered; this, I thought, would be useful in so many ways. Once I was protected, Choi Kyung-sik threw a potion on the floor.

Cl-Clink–!

Accompanied by the loud tinkle, we could hear security personnel begin to move overhead. I could even see the red dots on Jung Garam's floating map roaming about. I waited long enough for one dot to approach near and, as planned, ran off belatedly.

"Who's there!"

"Stop right there!"

The guards who discovered me stepped through the corridor in which mist was wafting upwards in barely visible curls. However, they fell flat on their face after a few steps. It seems like Choi Kyung-sik's potion worked.

The guards following behind them, after seeing their collapsed colleagues, tried to respond by covering their faces or wearing masks. But…

Crumple–

Sooner or later, all the hallways were filled with murky smoke; the last guard resisting the effects soon collapsed. Choi Kyung-sik smirked to himself and mumbled, “They should have cracked open a window. Idiots.”

“……”

“Stop dawdling and start moving.” Kim Olim grabbed my arm and began to run. Like that, we were able to enter the cellar easily.

“This…I think it’s iris recognition…”

The problem, though, was the secret safe. In front of the safe, there was an ordinary-looking security system; it seems like an iris was needed as a password.

It was futile to pull out a dead person’s eyes; the recognition would fail. I looked back at the servants, wondering how they would break through the difficult obstacle.

At that moment, Choi Kyung-sik approached me. He placed his hand on my shoulder and smiled, “Please summon me.”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: So much to think about: How about that subtle Woo Ragi flirting? What about Choi Lee-kyung improving–he's acting as bait without freaking tf out!

And also! Choi Kyung-sik is getting summoned for the first time.

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Chapter 284

Chapter 284

Without delay, I called out his name, “[Choi Kyung-sik].”

“Yes, yes~” Choi Kyung-sik raised his head and responded playfully. Soon, the light passing through him was blocked by an opaque body; he begun to cast a shadow. The alchemist stood firm in Geum Miyoung’s basement.

“Haah…” He exhaled for a long while, as if he had been holding his breath for quite some time. However, whereas I exhaled white mist, nothing came out of his mouth. Nevertheless, Choi Kyung-sik took another deep breath. It felt like…he was enjoying the feeling of being resurrected–of being alive.

Of course, he didn’t spend too much time luxuriating. After inhaling for the last time, Choi Kyung-sik opened his eyes immediately and said, “[Open Toolbox].”

Then, beneath his feet, a green magic circle appeared. I thought something would immediately follow, but only the magic circle appeared. However, Choi Kyung-sik continued, “[Search; Keyword: Prototype, Start].”

Just then, a strange voice came from the green circle. Exactly like…an artificial intelligence help program on an Apple Phone. **“[The ‘Prototype’ you are searching for is currently unstable. Do you wish to proceed?]”**

“[Proceed].”

Once it had received Choi Kyung-sik's confirmation, the green magic circle rumbled and heavily vibrated. Soon, a huge crack began to appear in the center of the circle.

Thin, white arms popped through the gap; I was shocked to see the face that followed–Geum Miyoung.

Despite the woman's pallid tone, her face and body looked incredibly normal, as if she were still alive. Just like that, Geum Miyoung(?) gently clawed up the magic circle. However, she couldn't walk, so she remained on her knees. Furthermore, her eyes blinked vacantly at nothing in particular.

Though I didn't ask him to justify those oddities, Choi Kyung-sik began to explain all on his own as if he were fending off my future complaints. "She lost too much of her brain mass as she was converted into a Homunculus."

I looked between the Alchemist and Geum Miyoung alternatingly before asking, "Is… Is she alive?"

"No way."

"……"

"She's just at the bare minimum needed to move around a little. That's not even a proper Homunculus. Anyway, first things first… [Prototype, Stand properly in front of the scanner]." Choi Kyung-sik shrugged his shoulders before commanding his creation.

After hearing his command, Geum Miyoung stood up sluggishly. Moving limply like a zombie, she stood in front of the iris scanning device and brought her pupils closer to the reticle.

[Security measures will be deactivated]

Now that the security was easily terminated, the tightly locked door opened wide on both sides.

The servants moved straight past Geum Miyoung and through the open door. I, too, hesitated before walking past the Homunculus. As I passed by, I took a quick glance and felt goosebumps rise all over my skin. A black, viscious liquid kept seeping from Geum Miyoung's nose; she kept her eyes trained on the scanner. I was afraid that this half-alive woman would appear in my dreams.

Fortunately, Choi Kyung-sik, bringing up the rear, grabbed my stiffened arm. He hugged me from behind, covered my eyes with his hands–like eyepatches–and whispered in my ears, "Don't look too closely at it."

"…W-Why?"

"It's such shoddy handiwork–I'm a bit embarrassed."

I would have never guessed that would be the reason, but… Haah. In anycase, ushered forth by Choi Kyung-sik, we were able to enter the warehouse containing the slush funds. We immediately found dozens of instant inventories in display cases.

"Let's open one." Kim Olim lifted up the glass window and placed the key in the top compartment. Choi Kyung-sik took over, gripped the key handle, and twisted his wrist in the air. It looked like the Alchemist was pantomiming opening a door.

Suddenly, a deep crack appeared in the air; gold coins and jewels poured down like a waterfall, pooling at my feet. All kinds of shiny, sparkling materials mixed into the overflowing hoard. Only when the basement floor was completely covered did the outpour finally stop.

Jung Garam quickly picked up one and bit it with his teeth. Woo Ragi scolded the Assassin, "Are you seriously trying to determine if it's real gold?"

Garam shouted, his cheeks flushing a rare red, "Hey! Why are you nagging at me?!"

However, Woo Ragi picked up a gorgeous necklace from the outpouring golden mountain and began to scrutinize the jewel embedded in the center. “Hey–this is a top-grade mana stone.”

Choi Kyung-sik responded, “Give it to me! Gimme!”

Woo Ragi lightly tossed the necklace at the Alchemist. The Alchemist grinned as he snatched it out of the air without letting it drop to the ground, mumbling, “Wow… For the first time in a while, it feels like I’ve entered a treasure room.”

Meanwhile, Lackey was diving into the sparkly, treasure-filled floor, scrambling around in its excitement.

“First, divide what’s here and place them in your inventories. For the rest of the keys… Choi Lee-kyung, place those all into your inventory.”

“Ah! Got it!” I was dazed by the enormous amount of jewels, but, after hearing Kim Olim’s instructions, I placed the keys to the display cases in my inventory as instructed.

It didn’t take long to pack up the keys, but, when I looked back after finishing my task, the bejeweled floor was completely swiped clean. Exactly like when we first arrived. Except for the jewels that Lackey had adorned itself on its neck and fingers. Because Kim Olim didn’t really remark on its appearance, I merely held the excited skeleton in my arms.

“Let’s leave now. It’s almost time for the security to switch shifts,” Kim Olim urged us. I tried to follow her out while carrying the heavy skeleton in my embrace.

“Huh?” However, at that moment, a small glimmer of light caught my eyes from behind the key box. I thought it might have been a key I missed, so I reached out and grabbed it. When I pulled it out, I realized that the key was a different color than all the other keys I collected. I approached the Paladin with the black key. “Excuse me… I found this towards the back… What is it?”

“Hm? Ah, that’s… a [sealed instant inventory]. Usually, one can open the inventory just by holding the key in hand, but, using something like that, one can place a double layer of security on the important items.” Kim Olim said as she looked closely at the black key I held. “I can’t really know for sure, as I don’t have any [appraisal] skills, but I believe it’d be best to take this one as well.”

“Alright. Can we use Geum Miyoung to bypass the security on this one as well?”

Jung Garam, who had been listening silently to me, suddenly reached out. “Give it to me.”

“Huh? Okay…” I handed Jung Garam the key.

The Assassin wore a monocle and stared at it for a long while. After careful examination, he grabbed the key and cautiously twisted it, as if he were cracking the code for a safe. Left twice; Right three times.

Thud–!

Jung Garam must have succeeded–something like a wooden coffin appeared in the air after the assassin finished his twists.

The issue, though, was that the coffin gave off an ominous aura. I tried to dissuade him from opening the thing, but Garam had already moved to open the lid without hesitation.

And…

“Ah.”

Inside… it looked to be a dusty, haphazard heap of secondhand items.

I noticed, among that heap, a long staff–the longest staff I’d ever seen. It looked familiar. I believe I’d seen it before, but… This was surely the first time I’d ever encountered something like that.

“This is… Seo Dawon…” However, before I could even speak, Jung Garam reached inside the coffin.

There was an old compass–glass broken–in his hands. Incomprehensible letters were embossed onto the compass’s frame, crammed onto any available surface. My mouth automatically closed when I saw the Assassin’s expression.

Kim Olim suddenly came closer; she also bent down and picked up a bird-shaped badge. During the [vengeful ghost memories], I remembered she had worn the badge on the edge of her shield when she was still alive.

Woo Ragi stood with his arms across his chest, looking down at a tasseled sword-sheathe belt. Though one of its wings was crushed, an ornamental butterfly adorned the belt.

Choi Kyung-sik blew on a half-demolished, round stone. Only when the dust was cleared did I recognize that the Alchemist was holding his Golem’s nucleus. Furthermore, there were a few other owner-less keepsakes. I suppose they belonged to the two guildmates we had yet to resurrect.

Of course it took us a long time to process… Clearly, relics from [Red Lotus] were collected and stored like garbage. I tried to say something, but I couldn’t think of the right words. In the end, I remained silent. Then, a system message popped up, triggered by this situation.

[Sub-scenario completed! Find the Past — You’ve acquired your Servant’s keepsakes.]

[You’ve succeeded in a fairly difficult mission! Nothing is more effective in inspiring the Servants’ resentment for revenge than showing them objects that make them recall the past.]

[As a reward, a multi-server has now been opened: you can summon two or more servants at the same time. However, if two or more servants are simultaneously summoned, the Necromancer’s vitality is consumed until the summons are recalled. So, be careful when using

this!]

[However, the amount of vitality required to summon each Servant varies depending on the level of friendship and intimacy.]

[The Scenario is paying attention to your rapid growth.]

The system was usually known for maliciously taunting their Users, but, today more than any other day, I wanted to pummel the guy who wrote its script.

‘Honestly, how does any of this merit congratulations?’

I tempestuously removed all the system messages that blocked my view.

Become a Patron!

TL: Scenario? Like the Scenario is a sentient being? I remember Kim Olim and Seo Dawon talking about that. Brrr, so ominous.

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Chapter 285

Chapter 285

“For now, I’ll put the rest of it away.” Though I loathed doing so, I sliced through their silence and put the remaining mementos into the inventory.

I came to this decision since we needed to quickly vacate this location, but I still didn’t feel too comfortable with this choice. Fortunately, the servants took their belongings without saying anything further; we began to silently move again.

“[Toolbox Installation].” Meanwhile, Choi Kyung-sik activated certain skills during our journey; green, glittering magic circles shone between pillars, seeping into the ground.

Just as we came above ground…

Weeeeeee Wooooo~!

We could hear police car sirens near the mansion. Did they discover Geum Miyoung’s vehicle, half destroyed, in the tunnel? Either way, that was a bad sign for us.

Choi Kyung-sik turned his head towards me and pointed to an escape route he had plotted before we broke into this place. “You should escape through there first.”

“…Yeah.” I turned on my heels, tensed my thighs, and ran as hard as I could.

Choi Kyung-sik’s last murmurs brushed past my ears, “[Prototype, self-destruct].”

“**[Your wish is my command.]**“

Then, as I ran away, I heard an unfamiliar noise behind me accompanied by a beeping noise. I continued on, hands covering my ears.

Then, a few seconds later…

Boom–!

I heard a deafening roar–the sound of the mansion being half-demolished. I also heard screams from those who had gathered around the front gate.

My feet stumbled in the aftermath of the explosion, but I managed to reach our getaway van without tripping over. Kim Olim started the car as soon as I clambered into the back seat.

* * *

“Any updates with Bae Jaemin?”

“He’s not making any particular movements. I’m keeping an eye on any contacts, just in case, but Kim Sangyoon also said he’s been quiet.”

When we returned to my home after finishing our tasks, it was already 5 am.

The TV was turned on as soon as we arrived; the explosion at Geum Miyoung's mansion was already reported.

Of course, the anchor didn't present this case as breaking news. The case was briefly summarized and transmitted to the audience through long subtitles at the bottom of the early morning news broadcast. It will probably be properly covered later in the day.

"Are we certain that the van wasn't tracked?" Woo Ragi glanced at the black vehicle parked outside the home before suddenly closing the curtains.

Garam answered his question. "I bought this car on the black market, so nothing will appear even if someone tries to track it."

"Seo Dawon even personally cast [stealth] on it." Kim Olim answered, utterly relaxed. Only then did Woo Ragi slowly move away from the window. And, now a little less nervous, I suddenly craved coffee and started boiling water.

"Let's check what's in the inventory and start sorting through." Choi Kyung-sik said, suddenly reminded of our bounty when he saw me sipping on coffee. Lackey, sitting in the corner of the living room with a golden tiara on his head, tilted its head to the side.

I nodded and placed the keys I had brought, one after the other, on the table. Soon enough, Jung Garam rushed to my side; Garam wore a monocle over one eye and observed the keys, one by one, telling me what they contained. "This is cash… These are items. And this one is just full of gold."

"Open the one with items."

"Is there anything Choi Lee-kyung can wear?"

“Can’t we cash those in at the market? We should separate salable items out first.”

“That’s easy enough. Besides, the seller’s face is hidden anyway.”

As they began to open the keys one by one, the servants gathered and sorted all the priceless commodities that had begun to fill the living room.

I sat quietly, staring at them and drinking another cup of coffee. To be frank, my mind had been stuck on something after returning from Geum Miyoung’s mansion; therefore, the dazzling jewels that were laid out didn’t really catch my eye.

‘[You can summon two or more servants using your vitality]’…huh.’

Pretending to be drowsy, I slipped out of the conversation and checked through the system messages that I had turned off earlier, during my fit of anger.

‘The system said that the amount of vitality consumed would be inversely proportional to the intimacy and friendliness I had managed to cultivate with my servant.’

Perhaps that meant there would be no big issue in summoning Seo Dawon. Maybe it would be similar to the burden of summoning Lackey. Then, after summoning Lackey and Seo Dawon, I would be able to call upon another member of [Red Lotus]. This was truly a huge increase in power.

‘Also, it said two or more people, right? I almost missed that clause in the excitement of being able to summon two spirits. Then… In theory, it would be possible to summon all the [Red Lotus] members.’

However, I was quite spooked at the price: my life.

I looked at the raised, slightly translucent bumps on my right hand: injection marks. When I saw those scars, I remembered the medicine that

made me nauseous as I drank it; the pain that suddenly could be only alleviated by painkillers. My brows furrowed automatically.

‘Considering how the [Vengeful Ghost Memories] drove me half to death… Realistically, summoning more than two people would probably be fatal.’

At my current level, it was too difficult to handle the risks that arose from making contracts in the first place.

However…

‘…This is one skill I can’t give up on.’

This skill could summon all the guild members at once. In addition, since the Servants were originally part of a guild and not single-player lone wolves, they were bound to be more effective when working in tandem. I was afraid, but, if I were to shift my perspective, perhaps the resulting penalty was something I could endure since I had already overcome so much pain in the first place.

”Well, even if it takes my life away…If I were to originally live to 100 years old but my lifespan was reduced to something like 80…wouldn’t it still be alright? Or…If the skill causes me to vomit blood or other similar symptoms, hospitals and modern medicine are quite good nowadays.’

Over the course of my frequent hospitalizations, I’ve become somewhat resistant to pain; the thought that ‘I can endure’ passed through my mind. In short, the desire to use this skill–and my expectations as to its great results–trumped my fear of pain.

However, I doubted that the servants would agree with my thoughts. Even now, I couldn’t tell whether or not they saw me as a hamster or human; humiliatingly, they treated an adult man as if he had no limbs or like an infant.

They were being overprotective because of my comparatively low stats. Moreover, the biggest obstacle was that the Servants could peruse through

all of my status windows.

‘They’ll probably check my status window and read the risks as soon as I state that I’ve gotten a skill upgrade. Then, they’ll never let me use it. Especially Seo Dawon… Seo Dawon would forbid me from summoning more than two people at all costs.’

How could I persuade these people?

I drank my last sip of coffee while brainstorming, when…

[Would you like to activate the Status Window Editor?]

‘…Huh?’

Startled by the sudden notification, my lips jolted away from the rim of the cup.

However, my coughs didn’t attract the attention of the servants that were still sorting and classifying the items. After slyly glancing at them, I cautiously moved my finger to the [activate] button and pressed it.

[If you select ‘edit mode’ from the default option in the status window, your status window’s privacy and ‘information disclosure’ levels can be changed.]

[The current level of information disclosure and privacy for User ‘Choi Lee-kyung’ is set to ‘full reveal.’]

[Press the ‘options’ button to switch to partial disclosure.]

[If you want to private only a specific portion, you can specify privacy levels for each section before pressing the option button.]

I was so dumbfounded I almost laughed helplessly.

‘How could this be? What amazing timing!’

It felt like someone was generous enough to support my need to use this skill. Of course, this wasn’t an entirely pleasant feeling–the timing felt ominous. It felt like I was trapped in someone’s grasp, unable to escape or resist.

However, though I felt unsettled, I couldn’t help myself. I dragged my cursor to highlight the sentences that mentioned the newly added ‘vitality’ and ‘life force’ in the summon skill.

[Are you certain you want to keep this section private?]

[Please note that the edited portion will be restored to its original text if you screenshot the undisclosed portion.]

[Editing complete.]

With that, the highlighted sentence was erased from my status window. The text implied I could use this skill without any consequences.

At that moment, I heard a familiar voice from behind. “Aren’t you tired?”

I looked back suddenly–as if I was startled awake. But, before I did so, I felt as if I were embraced by a chilly scent brought in by a winter breeze. Seo Dawon smiled down at me, who stared back with wide-open eyes.

———-

Become a Patron!

TL: Wtf…the system seems so sentient. And malicious.

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Chapter 286

Chapter 286

If you run into the person you like after you've done something they're sure to hate… You're sure to act as I did.

"Ha. Ha. Ha… Since. When. Were. You. There?"

"……?"

That is to say, you'd also be unable to make eye contact or talk properly due to the piercing guilt.

It's the perfect way to be outed as suspicious. For example, I really didn't have to freeze, unable to breathe in the aftermath of Seo Dawon's slow gaze across my body… Damn, I really hate that I'm like this, but I can't really fix my character.

Seo Dawon looked at me calmly; the corners of his lips raised up. His expression clearly stated, 'Just what is this guy scheming now?' Honestly, even I thought I was fucking questionable.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"W-What do you mean…"

"Your expression tells me that you're hiding something."

Seo Dawon leaned towards me, face tilted and certain. I stuttered, at a loss for what to say. At this rate, I was sure to confess everything.

However, the person who saved me…was Woo Ragi.

“Get a room, please.” Woo Ragi cracked down on our interaction as if he could no longer bear to see any ‘homoerotic’ behavior. At this moment, I felt grateful for his disgusting personality.

Seo Dawon tore his gaze off me and looked at the Swordsman. Then, he sluggishly responded, “Since this is Lee-kyung-ie’s house, shouldn’t Ragi be the one to leave?”

“Are you out of your mind? Time and place.”

“I! Am all~ for it! However, let me in too!”

“What kind of disturbing things are you saying Jung Garam!”

Fortuitously, even Garam-ie butted into our conversation…

Seo Dawon’s interrogative atmosphere was disrupted; I sighed with relief and slipped out of the Mage’s arms. Of course, Seo Dawon immediately grabbed my wrist, so I failed to escape completely.

Seo Dawon stared down at me with an awkward smile and asked the Servants, “Did something happen to Lee-kyung-ie today?”

“Mmm…Who knows. Ah! Maybe the coffin…?”

“Coffin?”

Choi Kyung-sik muttered, as if he had just remembered something while cautiously wiping the golem’s core clean. Seo Dawon continued to press on for more detail. I hesitated, and Woo Ragi answered before I could open my mouth, “We found your staff.”

“Where?”

“It was within Geum Miyoung’s stash. She had gathered our keepsakes– the items that were perhaps too troublesome to discard.” Woo Ragi revealed his hidden sword and tilted the handle forward. A butterfly-shaped

decoration was woven to the hilt with thread; the ornament was tilted slightly to the left.

As he showed his death keepsake, Woo Ragi shrugged, “I was wondering where the other side of this thing was…”

“Ahh…” Seo Dawon finally released my wrist and sighed quietly. He patted my head lightly and smiled bitterly, “You didn’t really have to tread on eggshells around me, though.”

“……” His misunderstanding was to my benefit, but my deception left a bad taste in my mouth. I took out the staff I had previously packed away and handed it to him wordlessly.

The Mage lifted the cracked staff. My heart felt uneasy as I saw him stare into the weathered and broken surface of the weapon. It was heartbreaking. And, my heart felt conflicted–my mind couldn’t decide whether or not it was okay to keep deceiving him…

“Lee-kyung-ah, will you buy me a new one?”

“A…Alright.”

“I’m glad.” Seo Dawon placed down the staff without any hesitation–as if it were some mass-produced industrial product and not some sentimental masterpiece. He then asked me to buy him a new weapon–it was obvious why he asked me for this favor.

‘…He didn’t want me to feel too melancholy.’

At that moment, I felt shaken again. I wanted to confess my deception to the Mage and instead persuade him to my cause instead.

Everyone here had their own burdens. There must be stories that couldn’t be told with these death mementos alone. However, perhaps the servants were trying to be considerate of me by staying silent. Just like how Seo Dawon asked me to buy him a new staff.

‘Therefore… It wouldn’t be good to place another burden on them.’

Seo Dawon would definitely be concerned about the implications behind my newly updated ability. To be honest, I suppose, if I were the Mage, I couldn't help but be concerned as well. After all, my life was the most important aspect of our contract… Also, though I'm a bit embarrassed to say this myself, Seo Dawon likes me… Well, probably.

And, I'm not taking my life for granted. If possible, the correct way forward would be to increase my friendship levels with my servants and increase my dominance over them.

'This is…a last resort option.'

Therefore, for the time being, I decided to hide this skill from everyone.

If they looked at the skill description, they'll just think that I can summon the servants. Although, this could become troublesome if they ask for me to practice the skill.

If I were to reveal the side effects, everyone will tell me not to use the skill. However, there will be circumstances where I can't avoid summoning more than 1 servant. Then, even if I were to willfully summon these people, they'll feel useless guilt for stealing away my life.

This is how I can do my part.

Resolve steeled, I scratched my head and took out my cell phone. "Do you want me to buy it on Market Raid? I'm talking about…your staff."

"Let's take a look." Seo Dawon sat down at the table and took my cell phone. The servants, who had finished roughly sorting the loot, began to gather around.

However, even after we scrolled down for a long while, no one reacted. Unlike his previous nonchalant attitude, the Mage concentrated hard on the screen.

"Nothing catches your eye…?" I asked, after 30 minutes of breathless, tiring window shopping.

Seo Dawon answered without raising his head, “Mm.. There is… But the price is a bit…”

“Ah, really?” How expensive is it for someone like Seo Dawon to worry? I paused momentarily before continuing forward, letting curiosity show in my voice, “You don’t have to worry about the price.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. To be honest… I wouldn’t have any money without you guys.”

His expression now bright, Seo Dawon entered [Lee Dojin] into the search bar and clicked on his [Made to Order] tab. I flinched momentarily, but, because I felt guilty for deceiving him and because I wanted to buy him some excellent equipment, I kept silent

The Mage sorted the available designs by price and pressed on the coolest-looking one. Then, without any hesitation, he continued to add more and more paid extras to the staff.

I slipped my gaze away–I’m sure the ordered staff would cost an astronomical amount. Not looking at the price would probably be better for my mental health.

However, the problem wasn’t solely Seo Dawon. The observing servants piped in with their own two cents.

“My dagger is also… it’s almost corroded.”

“There’s a small crack on the bottom of my shield…but you don’t need to worry about it.”

“Usually one replaces the flight stones of a echo blade on an annual cycle, but it’s already been three years…”

“Lee-kyung-ssi. There’s a 30% discount coupon targeted at Alchemists. 30% discounts on Golem Nucleuses aren’t so common…”

I looked at every servant, one by one; they all had such tearful, pleading faces. Ah, come on… Isn't making that kind of expression cheating?

"O-Of course… I'll buy them. For you guys too…" Eventually, I readily(?) opened my wallet.

Seo Dawon, who continued to add extra add-ons with no end in sight, raised his head when he received the notification [No more extras can be added.]. From my brief glance at his face, I could see a slight rosy red blush on his face; for the first time, I thought he looked his age. 'So cute…'

"Thanks, Lee-kyung-ah." He approached me, as if he had read my thoughts, and hugged me tightly.

It was my first time seeing Seo Dawon act like this, so, drunk on the atmosphere, I began talking nonsense. "It's nothing… haha! Isn't there anything else you want to buy?

"Mm, a cape? After all, Mages…look cooler when casting magic when they're wearing a cape."

"T-That's right… Very important." Though inwardly I didn't think this was right, I kept nodding. I couldn't help myself.

* * *

–Hello! This is the 'Market Man.' Are you home? There are delivery items that need to be signed by the order recipient… Let's see… There's about 130 items! Wow–you've ordered so much.

"…Yes, I'm at home. What time will you be coming?"

–I think I'll arrive in an hour. The delivery car is almost filled up completely with Choi Lee-kyung-ssi's items. Ahahaha. You must have just moved in?

“Yes…well. Haha…ha.”

As Market Raid boasts a fast delivery rate, the delivery day from hell started a day after our order was placed.

Aside from the [made-to-order] times, the Servant bastards kept asking to buy them more stuff, saying they needed this and that. Later on, they didn’t even ask for my permission and continued to add things into the car…eventually, it all turned out this way:

I recalled the utterly sweet, cute, affectionate, and lovable Mage from yesterday.

‘I honestly super liked it…’

As a result of being drunk off the atmosphere, without really being able to relish the loot we retrieved from Geum Miyoung’s stash, we used it to buy new equipment. The money that was left in my bank account was nearly empty as well.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung-ah…. Tsk tsk.

Also, heads up, I’ll be going on Winter Break soon. AKA my Mother in law is dragging me first to San Diego and then to Hawaii. So I’ll be travelling a

lot in the upcoming days. Therefore, my upload may be erratic. I know I’ve been slow a lot lately, so I apologize >.<

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Chapter 287

Chapter 287

‘Somehow, I feel like I’ve been tricked…’

The Servants, who had been bothering and circling me until now, disappeared like ghosts as soon as they found out that I had run out of money.

Eventually, the only one left by my side was a tiara-adorned Lackey, and…

“They’re coming?”

…And Seo Dawon, who was holding me in his arms. He dragged me into his embrace, still lounging on the bed, after I entered the bedroom after wrapping up the matter regarding our deliveries.

I didn’t hate the fact that he buried his face in my stomach like a child. I didn’t hate it…it was…merely a problem. Absentminded, I barely managed to spurt out an answer. “Yeah… But, what did you guys order? I’m clueless…”

“I bought a few items and clothes.” Seo Dawon said, very simply, but I knew that the monetary amount of his orders was way more than the other Servants. Seo Dawon must know that, right? Was that why he was trying to act cute? I could only sigh inwardly and stroke his pitch-black hair with my hands.

Ding Dong–

And… Finally, our delivery arrived.

Usually, only one delivery person would arrive, but, for some reason, there were two people standing at the door.

However, the clothes the two were wearing were different: One was wearing an incredibly familiar Market Raid delivery uniform, and the other was adorned with a suit and briefcase.

“Hello. We’re from Market Raid.” After greeting me politely, they handed me a key-shaped item. I could already recognize that it was an [instant inventory].

“There were many items within your order that needed to be accepted after you check the appraiser’s warranty certificate. I’ve arrived with an agent who will provide the accident insurance and notarization documents for each of those items.”

“Ah, Y-yes…”

“Could I first ask for your signature here?” The man in the suit handed over a document–a receipt?–while the excited Servants surrounded us. I signed all the documents and returned the provided ballpoint pen to the notary.

“Thank you. Please continue to use Market Raid profusely.”

“Yeah…” I bade my polite farewells and saw them off; Kim Olim closed the front door straight away.

The [instant inventory] key in my hand was stolen by Jung Garam before I could even register his movements. I flopped down wordlessly on the sofa. Perhaps Lackey was also feeling the ambient anticipatory excitement; it clung onto my heels as it looked towards the living room.

“As expected of Market Raid–this is great service!”

“Are the weapons still en route for delivery?”

“Since they’re from Lee Dojin, it shouldn’t take long.”

The noisy servants soon shut their mouths and stared silently as Jung Garam twisted the key. Soon, the living room was filled with light as a brilliant shine poured forth.

‘There’s at least dozens of DAA boxes alone in there…’

My mouth hung wide open when I saw the familiar brand name on the box. They were from DAA’s fashion line–which also ships from Market Raid–so they couldn’t be items…

‘3 million won for a T-Shirt…That’s impossible..’

However, the shock didn’t end there. Seo Dawon opened the DAA box with a few flicks of his fingers and lifted out the clothes, one after the other. The clothes were mainly colored a beautiful white or pink. Maybe I didn’t know much about fashion, but, though the clothes were quite tidy and pretty, they honestly looked a little too undignified for Seo Dawon.

‘It looks a little too small?’

Did he order the wrong size?

However, Seo Dawon approached my side while floating the clothes in the air. Then, the docile shirt hanging behind him suddenly flew under my chin.

“W-What?!”

“Cute.”

“It’s good. I think he’d look good in navy blue as well.”

“I bought a cardigan in that color.”

What was more ridiculous was Kim Olim who, while conversing with the Mage, pulled a branded sneakers box off the pile and walked over to me.

I couldn’t think of something to say when she placed the sneakers at my feet. The paladin even kneeled down on one knee to put the shoes on me.

“W-Wait a minute! Hey! Why did you guys buy clothes for me?!”

Jung Garam, who was eagerly opening something with a dagger behind me, answered for everyone. “Choi Lee~kyung~… How could you wear the same clothes twice in one week?”

“What the…”

In addition, as if he were agreeing with Jung Garam, Choi Kyung-sik intervened in our conversation and scolded me, “I was startled when I first saw your closet. You didn’t even have the basics.”

And, Seo Dawon gently grabbed my chin and mumbled a bit apologetically, as if he found my situation a bit pitiful, “Lee-kyung-ie… You used to sell fans on Market Raid. You couldn’t afford to buy clothes.”

“What fans?”

“You know, the… things that drop when you defeat Orcs. Don’t you remember?”

“Or…c?”

Woo Ragi, tearing a box with his echo blades behind us, raised his eyebrows. “Those things sell?”

“He was working hard to sell them…”

“You would have been better off grinding.” [1]

“Shut up!”

“Every time I hit the nail on the head, he tells me to shut up.”

I shouted angrily at Woo Ragi’s scornful words, and the Swordsman subsequently brushed me off. Meanwhile, Kim Olim succeeded in putting

the sneakers on my feet and tied the shoelaces. Then, she took my hand and made me stand. “Try walking around.”

“Hey! You guys… Am I a kid or something?”

“Your feet don’t hurt?”

“…No it…doesn’t. Actually, that’s not important–you guys are really going overboard.”

Woo Ragi laughed and made sarcastic remarks at my flushed face. “If you’re ugly, you should at least wear nice clothes.”

“It’ll be winter, so it’s a good thing to buy new outfits in advance.” In the end, with Seo Dawon’s statement, I was forced to sit down on the sofa again.

‘Honestly, why did they buy things for me while pretending to shop for themselves?’

Honestly, I didn’t think it would feel this weird if they had bought stuff for themselves. Fortunately, at least in Woo Ragi’s or Jung Garam’s case, it didn’t seem like they were solely buying useless items for the sake of giving me a hard time.

In particular, Woo Ragi, that bastard, was completely absorbed in hanging a new pretty butterfly decoration on his sword. When I saw him working so hard at attaching that ornament, I thought, ‘So guys like him have their own quirks and desires huh?’ Of course, when he felt my gaze, I felt his expression turn into a discontent glare.

And, Garam was…

“Choi Lee-kyung! If I put this here, it’ll look good, right?”

He had hung fairy lights, shiny bulbs hanging on a wire, on the art wall in the center of the living room.

Though it was pretty, the lights didn’t fit with the current modern interior. However, after seeing Lackey open its mouth with awe at the lightbulbs, I simply nodded. The skeleton leaped a few times, trying to grab the shining lightbulbs hanging high in the air before sitting down at its feet and staring at the light endlessly.

“Hehehe~” Though Choi Kyung-sik seemed quiet, it turned out that most of the boxes that arrived today were his items. He hummed, throwing bags of suspicious powder into his inventory, one by one.

“What did Choi Kyung-sik-ssi buy?”

“Ingredients for Golems. I need at least one right now.”

…Didn’t it cost tens of billions to make one golem?

Choi Kyung-sik sighed regretfully, “Well, it was hard to choose its final form, but… I think I can make something usable out of all this.” Then, after pushing a mountain of boxes to one side of the living room, he went straight to the second floor.

* * *

Afterwards, we cleaned up all the trash left behind; Seo Dawon filled my empty closet. Now, even Kim Olim was absorbed in applying an abradant–polishing paste–to her shield.

So, after a long while, I quietly returned to my bedroom by myself. The bedroom was slightly messy, but I was more bothered by my new clothes hanging in the now half-open closet.

At that moment, Seo Dawon, who had left my side for a while, suddenly entered the bedroom as well. He glided inside, glanced at the open closet, and looked back at me–laughter on his lips. “You don’t like it?”

“No… It’s not that.” Resigned, I sighed and stared back.

Honestly, expensive clothes like those deserved to be worn on a proper clothes hanger, right? For example…someone like Seo Dawon, who was walking over here in long strides. I then thought about what he would look like in casual clothes.

‘Comfortable clothes would look good on him also, right?’

First of all, he was tall; he had long legs and wide shoulders that would be the envy of any man… Then, I imagined what would happen if the Mage’s clothes flowed off him like water….and then quickly shook my head. Am I going crazy?

“Are you going to sleep?” he asked.

“W-Who knows…”

Of course, Seo Dawon, who couldn’t possibly know my thoughts, calmly approached my bed. I laid down with my back turned towards him and tried to dispel my own delusions.

However, just then, a translucent system message popped up before my eyes like the devil’s whisper.

[Do you want to change your Servant’s outfit?]

[If you choose the ‘Take off the top’ option, your choice will be applied to the Servant’s appearance.]

“W…What?!!” My body sprang up automatically, like a spring.

Become a Patron!

TL: O.O

I see. We’re playing dress-up doll now.

Footnotes

1. comes from a Japanese word. Essentially it means to work hard, and colloquially refers to manual laborers like construction workers. In a gaming setting, means to grind.

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Chapter 288

Chapter 288

No-no! I swear! I never wanted to force the clothes off of Seo Dawon. Also, I'd *_never_* thought about stealing a glimpse of his body. I earnestly drove any sexual or lusty thoughts about the Mage out of my head.

Above all, I couldn't do something like that to Seo Dawon when we were surrounded by the other Servants. And, even if the system were to tempt me when we were alone together…

'Everyone would notice the moment I make any noise… Then, I'd have to take my own life at that point…'

Because of my class's *_unique ability,_* the other Servants were sure to gather around as soon as I made a strange noise.

'No matter where I hide, those guys are sure to find me.'

At that point, I'd have to explain why I made such a strange noise to the servants that were sure to come rushing through the door…

Just imagining that situation made me want to die. Therefore, I never dared to let such lusty thoughts enter my brain. That was why I was even more shocked. Why…How…Did this message appear? And such timing as well? Why must I suffer through this ordeal?

'This crazy bastard system!'

The desire to not be caught dominated my thoughts at the moment. Furthermore, I wanted to prevent such strange delusions from appearing in the first place.

So, I hurriedly reached out to exit the system window. However, the problem was Seo Dawon was faster than me. His cold fingers dug into my side; startled, I flinched more than necessary, and I rolled off the bed. “Hnnghaahhhh!”

“…Lee-kyung-ah?” Seo Dawon glanced down at me, who had rolled over the edge. His suspicious gaze roamed over my cold-sweat-drenched face. “What’s wrong?”

“…W-What do you mean? I-I didn’t do anything?!”

Even though I barely managed to exit the [change of clothes] window in time, the Mage’s expression still looked strange. Was I caught? I tried to search for the answer in his face, but I couldn’t read his thoughts.

After a few breath-stopping seconds, the Mage reached out to me. I closed my eyes reflexively, but… I soon felt a chilly hand covering my forehead. When I opened my eyes, he was calmly checking my temperature.

“It doesn’t seem like he’s sick,” Seo Dawon murmured.

“……”

And… Ironically, that cold touch made me even more inflamed. The Mage paused for a moment after seeing my flushed ears. “Hmmm….”

Of course, that didn’t mean he was generous and left me alone; the bastard came closer to me, smiling as I retreated to the wall. His smile was so sinister. “You don’t want me to touch your waist?”

“…I-It’s not like that…”

“Then, can I touch you?”

It was only after I saw his smile that I realized that this man was a pervert that wouldn't lose to the system, but I was already too late.

Seo Dawon folded me into his arms and gently grabbed my chin. Then, using his fingers, he slowly drew a line along my neck and collar. I jumped to avoid his hand, but…. I failed, of course.

"D-Don't do that." Eventually, I grabbed his finger while trembling.

However, Seo Dawon merely lowered his eyes and asked back, "Don't do what?"

"This…" I was going to point to his touches, but the Mage was faster. He rubbed his lips against my captive fingers. After handing my hand back to me, he started to grope at my neck with his lips. He wasn't licking me with his tongue or anything, but… What he did was stimulating enough.

Seo Dawon gently chewed at my blushing neck skin; he pressed against my wriggling chest with his palm. Then, he laughed in a low tone once he noticed my galloping heart.

"Heeek… Mmnn…!"

Eventually, I was unable to endure and moans threatened to spill out of my mouth, but the Mage swallowed them all.

The tongue that kept persistently licking at an area of skin that had never been lapped at before made my stomach tense. On top of that, Seo Dawon slowly lowered his hand, which had been pressing on my chest, down my body. The shirt I was wearing slightly opened, exposing skin.

'At this rate…'

I managed to come to my senses and grab his invading wrist.
"Haah….Haa…"

Fortunately, the Mage stopped there. Although…his expression looked deeply unsatisfied.

He looked down at my shaking self, still holding onto his wrist, before bowing his head towards me again. He didn’t touch my body anymore, but, considering our entangled legs, I didn’t count on his audacity and flexibility to give me a kiss. Eventually, I kept my lips closed and turned my head. However, Seo Dawon chewed on my closed lips, a bit painfully.

“Ah!”

“Are you going to continue to be mean to me?”

How shameless–was he rebuking me after nearly ripping off my lips?

I pummeled his shameless shoulders with my fist. “Every…Everyone’s going to hear!”

“Don’t tell me, you didn’t think I’d take care of all of that?”

“What? W-When on earth did you…”

“About when you wanted to take my clothes off?”

“…W-What!?”

Seo Dawon tilted his head, paying little attention to my shocked expression. Then, he looked down at my astonished face and delivered my personal death sentence. “The [Change Outfit] option also notifies the Servant.”

“……”

“You hesitated about taking off my top.”

I immediately kicked the Mage and tried to stand. Of course, despite my efforts, I failed to achieve anything meaningful since Seo Dawon didn’t move.

The Mage grabbed me by my ankle and spread my legs; he didn’t seem to care that he got kicked. He then held my ankle high above his shoulders and perched his cheek against the lateral malleolus. [1]

“Pervert,” he sulkily condemned me, eyes wide open.

I lost my mind; I shouted, “No! I’ve never thought about–not even a little…!”

“Not even once?”

“T-That’s…! No, never! Never!!” I was gradually being drawn into his cross-examination.

All kinds of delusions–fantasies–that sometimes appeared in my dreams passed through my head in the blink of an eye. That was why my denial came a beat late. I belatedly tried to fix my mistake, but Seo Dawon was already giggling.

“So, you totally used me like some side dish…” [2]

“……”

“How impressive–And you looked so innocent, too.”

Tears gathered in my eyes. Seo Dawon did not quit even though he saw my shameful tears. Definitely not–forget about quitting, he came closer and kissed my frowning face here and there.

“I’ll say it! [Seo Da–….]!” I tried to use my last resort, unable to stand my shame, but Seo Dawon was faster and blocked me.

He looked down at me with a cheeky smile that wouldn’t be out of place on a gangster. “I understand. I won’t go further than this, today, so…”

“……!”

“Don’t push me away, yeah?” He removed his hand and landed a kiss on me.

The Mage kissed more fervently than before. Every now and then, his lips lifted off mine so he could spout even more shameful demands. ‘Suck my tongue well. Don’t let our drool dribble down–try swallowing.’

I had no choice but to move my lips against Seo Dawon, responding to his requests with feathery brushes, until my lips were tingling. Whenever the Mage said something strange, I hit him on the shoulder. However, ironically, the more I seemed to detest the idea the more his playful side was activated.

* * *

“Choi Lee-kyung, what’s with the mask?”

“I guess Lee-kyung-ie caught a cold.”

“Really?”

Seo Dawon answered calmly on my behalf while I flinched and trembled at the onslaught of questions pouring my way.

I shook the Mage’s hand off my shoulder while sucking kale juice up a straw through a gap in my mask. Undaunted, he touched my ears gently. The slight touch brought back memories of what had happened yesterday.

Boom–!

I jumped to my feet, ran to my room, locked the door, and buried my face in the bed.

Soon, however, the Mage slowly stroked my back. My fists clenched– what use was the lock on my door?

Regardless of my anger, he asked, “Does it hurt?”

“Don’t touch me…!”

“You asked me to touch you yesterday.”

I turned to him as soon as I heard those words. Seo Dawon promised to take what happened yesterday to his grave–to hold my shame as a secret, but he immediately broke that promise.

He shrugged at my angry expression, “What is it?”

“You said you wouldn’t talk about what happened yesterday!”

“What’s wrong–it’s only the two of us here.”

“……”

“I said I cast [silent] onto this bedroom, right?”

I glared at Seo Dawon–the Mage spoke as if he were currying compliments from me.

Despite my ugly expression, the Mage still hugged me and rubbed his face against the small of my back. I lost all confidence in our distance–I couldn’t predict whether or not the Mage would stop here or do something senseless like what had happened yesterday.

So, I pushed his face away with my hand…at least, I did until he did something crazy like licking my palm.

I couldn’t resist shouting, “Are you seriously out of your mind?”

“I was joking…” He giggled, hugging me and kissing me on my cheek to try and alleviate my anger. However, when I avoided even that affection, he took my chin and looked into my eyes. Then, in a wicked tone, he whispered, “If you take all you wanted from my body and then become so cold right afterwards… What am I supposed to do?”

Become a Patron!

TL: O.O I guess we'll learn what they *did* in the upcoming chapter. As well as further hangups and relationship issues that Lee-kyung and Dawon have. Especially Seo Dawon–I'll probably talk about his weirdness regarding relationships and physical affection next chap. However, Lee-kyung has an interesting hang-up about sexuality. It seems like he feels almost inherent shame for having lust…but lust is in *almost* all of us. (Like when he felt ashamed that Seo Dawon reminded him that he said he wanted the Mage to touch him.) I wonder what ya'll think?

I wonder if that's internalized homophobia. I knew an ex-gf that felt that way all through highschool. Like she idolized the romantic relationship but felt deep shame about wanting sex. But who knows! Certainly not me >.<

Footnotes

1. The bone that juts out on the outside of your ankle.
2. Side dish, here, meaning wank material. Aka Choi Lee-kyung had fantasies about Seo Dawon in the lust bank.

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Chapter 289

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“Don’t play tricks on me.” Of course, I wasn’t able to firmly refuse Seo Dawon no matter what trickery he schemed. The series of events last night significantly reduced my confidence in him.

‘He’s even crazier than Koo Hui-seo.’

I glared at Seo Dawon with flames in my eyes as I recalled last night’s events. However, the Mage simply lounged around me. He hugged me in his embrace and laughed quietly.

I was going to be strict with this man–unlike my lenience yesterday. “If you do something like that again…”

“I’m going to go for it whenever I get the chance.”

“What?”

“So, hurry up and raise your ‘domination’ levels. It would be too dull to do it with ‘this body.'” [1] With that said, Seo Dawon lifted his hands towards the curtains–to where the light flooded into the room. After seeing the light permeate through, he burst into laughter at my astonished expression. “What’s with that face?”

“Are you asking because you really don’t know?” I was shocked; I had no idea how the Mage could be so brazen.

However, he shrugged nonchalantly. “You and I aren’t minors.”

“It’s not about being a minor; it’s a matter of common sense.” I tried to grumble and protest about yesterday’s events, but then I felt the greatest shame I had ever felt in my life… The mere memory took its toll on my brain.

Seo Dawon stared at me, chin in hand, grinning constantly. I wanted to shout, ‘Say something if you have something to say.’ My indignance was fueled by his shameless expression; however, I couldn’t speak anymore and covered my head with the blanket. “So… D-Don’t…tease me with that ridiculing expression.”

My frustration had yet to be relieved, so I still complained from underneath my blanket. However, Seo Dawon raised his heavy arm and hugged me through the covers. He locked me in his embrace and slowly stroked at the uncovered top of my head. He also apologized quite insincerely, “Sorry… But, what do you mean by ‘teasing’ or ‘ridiculing’?”

“……”

“I’ve only ever complimented you. I’ve only ever called you pretty.”

I flinched and elbowed him. Seo Dawon, though, ignored my struggle and asked again, “Or…are you talking about the time I called you cute?”

“Shut up!”

Following his words, I lowered the blanket and yelled at the Mage. I was kissed one-sidedly again, as if he had been waiting for my face’s re-emergence; his hand cupped my cheek. He didn’t do anything so difficult to handle–as he did at dawn–but I was still unfamiliar with this level of affection.

Seo Dawon looked down at my panting self and enjoyed himself by occasionally squishing my cheeks. His expression was so irritatingly cheeky; the Mage quickly hugged me before I could become too angry. “I’m not teasing you, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I know you’re incredibly elated right now.”

“Of course I’m happy… I want to keep doing this with you.” The mage tilted his head as he continued to meet my eyes.

I was utterly amazed at what he just spouted. ‘I want to keep doing this…’ he said… Was this really the person who changed lovers like he changed clothes…?

‘Since when has he been so stubborn…?’

After he passed me by, when he finally left me alone, wouldn’t I become a ragged shell of a human being?

However, perhaps Seo Dawon wasn’t cognizant of his own personality changes; he didn’t hesitate. Rather, he asked another question, as if *I* were the strange one. “Have you never felt that way?”

Of course, I’d also wished that, just once, Seo Dawon would open his heart and clearly tell me that he liked me. Furthermore, it was impossible to not have racy fantasies while dealing with him.

‘…However! I’ve never been in a relationship!!’

That was why the sexiest thing my brain could think up were only kisses.

I wasn’t the type of person to watch porn… If I were to try and replace the hazy figures in my fantasies with the Mage, my delusions had always ended fuzzily at ‘kissing.’ That was the limit of my shabby imagination.

However, Seo Dawon was different, I suppose… Before he died, he was known for his prolific private life…and…

‘His nickname was…’

Just as I thought that, I became a little depressed and clenched my lips shut. Almost automatically, I fired back a reproach, “Y-You… You’re too fast. And, I… You know I’m nervous.”

“……”

“Doing these sorts of things may mean nothing to you, but…” As I spoke, I took a sly glance at the Mage. I thought he would laugh or treat me like a fool, but he looked somewhat annoyed.

Seo Dawon kept his mouth shut, as if to stop himself from talking out loud; but, I could clearly see that his excited energy was dampened. So, I stopped talking, letting my words dissipate vaguely.

Twisting the ring on his thumb–as he usually did when annoyed, the Mage said, “I get it. I’ll keep my mouth closed next time.”

“It’s not just that…”

“However, why do you always think I’m sneering at you? If you don’t trust me, activate my **[current mood]** and check my thoughts.”

Startled, I cringed at the Mage’s rapid-fire bluntness. However, he didn’t stop there and pinched at my cheeks, holding onto my stretched skin. I couldn’t complain and simply stared at him.

Still maintaining that position, Seo Dawon, who was either angry or frustrated, said coldly, “I like you, Lee-kyung-ah. I don’t know if you’re the type whose affections cool off once the chase is over and you have your hands on the prize, though.”

“What…?”

The way he spoke… I didn’t think the confession was his end goal–I felt a little out of the loop. Seo Dawon’s ‘confession’ did not end there; he continued, as if pushing me with his cold tone, “But what can I do? I’m truly sorry I’m not a fantastic man as you’ve imagined… Honestly, I was so nervous yesterday I couldn’t even fulfill a tenth of my usual vulgar thoughts. I just ‘helped’ you a little with my hands.”

“…W-Wait a minute!” I wanted to cover the Mage’s mouth, but, when my fingers touched his lips, he bit them quite painfully.

When I withdrew in surprise, he said sarcastically, “Honestly, the fact that you’ve never thought about being with me in this way… I wonder if it’s because of my body’s defects. I suppose your brain blocked all these potentialities. ‘What could you do with a dead man?’ etc.”

“I-It’s not like that…”

“Whenever I say, ‘I like you,’ I mean it. Body and all. But, everytime I say something like this, you’re so scared; it’s as if I dropped some sort of bomb.”

“……”

“Or, were you thinking you’d just hold my hand and change my clothes? Like playing with dolls?”

Seo Dawon appeared as if he were picking a fight–his tone certainly suggested his eagerness to tussle.

My lips quivered before I spoke clearly, “You…really need to fix your habit of speaking so meanly.”

Seo Dawon snorted. “Why? Is this breaking your fantasies?”

“…And I’ve already said that being ‘dead’ isn’t one of your flaws!” Eventually, I also exploded. I pushed the Mage away; he docilely retreated a few steps. We stared at each other, the comfortable bed in between us, as if we wanted to rip into and eat each other.

I opened my mouth first. “You keep on talking about your death as if I… As if you think I’m treating you like an object instead of a human. I-I’m not…a deviant paraphile, alright?” [2]

There were too many things to argue, but I felt like my head was being overloaded due to my anger. Meanwhile, Seo Dawon snorted at my statement.

‘Oh, he really wants to try this with me?’ I gritted my molars and finished what I had to say. “And, about your past… I now know how strongly I sympathized and simply went with your opinions because of the Vengeful Ghost Memories… But, that’s not everything!”

However, Seo Dawon didn’t answer. He looked suspicious, as if there were some underlying conspiracy for why I liked him.

I added angrily, “Why must my affections for you be tested everytime?”

“I can’t read your mind. How can I believe you when you show no signs of it.”

At that remark, I sarcastically thought, ‘So, he’s able to hide that sort of insecurity and still do *_those sorts of things_* yesterday, huh…?’

“So, basically, you’re only able to make assumptions from my reactions. Is that what you’re saying?” In other words, everytime I rejected him, he couldn’t prevent such insecure thoughts from popping up? I was frustrated, but I stepped back and squeezed out, “I… As long as you don’t talk as if you’re ridiculing or making fun of me, I don’t hate it!”

“I didn’t make fun of you.”

“You were laughing!”

“Can’t I laugh because I like you?”

—

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: These two insecure birds

Lee-kyung doesn’t understand that Seo Dawon probably takes physical affection as a sign of love (and also that he’s not as ‘flippant’ about love as much as the rumors make him out to be…since Lee-kyung never saw Ryu Hyerin’s flashback as we, the readers, did) but also thinks that Seo Dawon will eventually leave him or is ridiculing him due to his low self-esteem. Seo Dawon doesn’t understand Lee-kyung’s hesitation towards physical affection–plus Lee-kyung seems like the guy who needs verbal reassurance.

In short, their love languages are in conflict D:

At least we got a direct confession from Seo Dawon?? (Also, omg, Dawon called him pretty >///<)

Footnotes

1. By ‘this body,’ Seo Dawon means his ghostly body.
2. paraphilia = sexual desire towards objects. Think of the lady that married the eiffel tower or the man who married his anime body pillow.

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Chapter 290

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What does it mean when he says he likes me with such a vicious tone? I turned my head, arms crossed; Seo Dawon glared at the innocent wall with his galling face.

Bang–!

Just then–half the door was suddenly ripped off with a huge explosion; I looked that way, startled.

Jung Garam was the one who broke through the door. The Assassin, with an expression that could only be described as wicked, looked alternatingly between us and shouted triumphantly, “What kind of suspicious things are you doin….Ara?”

However, soon, he felt that the atmosphere between me and the Mage was unusual, so he stood still and merely blinked. For some reason, he looked a bit embarrassed, as if he realized his rash entrance wasn’t the best course of action.

Seo Dawon almost growled, “You aren’t going to leave?”

“Umm… Were you two fighting?”

“Get out.”

At the Mage’s chilly instruction, Jung Garam turned his back without making another peep; however, his expression, which I saw when the Assassin glanced at me before leaving the room, was sparkling with excitement.

I sent a paranoid and frustrated look at the blameless Jung Garam, as if the Assassin were a twisted asylum patient. As soon as our eyes made contact, though, Seo Dawon reached out and gathered a golden light on the smashed door; the visible living room was soon blocked from view.

That’s where Garam’s voyeurism ended. The Mage walked up to me with a cold expression–I nearly felt chilly wind wafting from him. “Choi Lee-kyung.”

“…….” I stared back wordlessly.

He glared at my silent self before muttering to himself, “Why can’t servants see their master’s [current mood]?”

“……”

“How fucking unfair.”

However, I wasn’t looking at Seo Dawon’s [current mood] either. I had no particular desire to look at it. What use would it be to read his innermost thoughts that were sure to be filled with doubts and irritation?

“I don’t have anything to hide, unlike you; you don’t need it.” I retorted, bluntly. Seo Dawon raised his eyebrows at that response.

Just when our war of words was about to reignite, a sudden kick on the door echoed throughout the room.

“Just get it over and done with roughly and then come out.”

That was Woo Ragi’s voice.

Seo Dawon looked as if he were going to ignore it, but I belatedly remembered that we were in the middle of Geum Miyoung’s case and

grabbed the Mage's arm first. My touch stopped Seo Dawon in his tracks; his gaze fixated on my hand.

"…For now, let's table this discussion until later," I said.

"……" Seo Dawon didn't answer, but he docilely turned his back away.

* * *

As expected, Bae Jaemin was totally distracted by Geum Miyoung. He didn't even contact me even though the day he was supposed to meet me passed. He probably didn't have to capacity to deal with me as well. As he was being swayed here and there by his current situation, he just couldn't afford to care about me.

Even the news blaring from the living room TV intensively reported about Geum Miyoung's horrific death and the terrorist attack on her residence. In particular, this case received a lot of attention not only from the hub but from the outside world as well, since it was unclear who the culprit was.

[Today's Tax Corporation CEO, Geum Miyoung, who was suspected of tax evasion, was found dead in her home. Geum Miyoung was reportled found at her home the morning after receiving the prosecutions summons. In the midst of all these suspicions, any financial fraud findings must also weigh on the murder as well, right?]

[Yes, that's right… Especially, what was found at the scene…]

Not only the news, but online communities like [Rank God] were also quite noisy. Geum Miyoung wasn't a famous, widely-known ranker, but

information on a certain ‘thing’ that was said to have been found in her ‘mansion’ was leaked. The daily bulletin board heated up as rumors began to spread.

.

<Geum Miyoung is also a part of Red Lotus *shiver shiver*>
Author: Biohunter

When I went to ‘Today’s Tax Co’s’ homepage, I looked through the CEO’s history. She’s connected to Red Lotus. *shiver shiver*

Honestly, what’s going on?

Also, the Jeju Island murder case as well.. People are saying that the unsub is the same. [1]

Comments (Expand)

Lee Gu-hwang (Warrior): P H S [2] wasn’t part of Red Lotus though
└**Strong Classes Only:** Bae Jaemin, someone from Red Lotus, established Hahae, and PHS is an exec there.
└**Beep Beep Beep:** Well, if you say it like that, then the whole nation is related to the R L. You guys make all sorts of connections.
└**Strong Classes Only:** I’m just saying that it’s not totally irrelevant, you r*tard lolol

<But, there's no news articles about the discovery of the item related to the Red Lotus>
Author: Just A Lurker

There's no proof?

Comments (Expand)

Diamond: (Photo)
┗ **Just a Lurker:** *shiver shiver* Who took the photo?
┗ ┗ **Diamond:** There was a User on the Free-chat Forum that identified himself as part of the investigation team. That post is deleted now, though.
┗ ┗ ┗ **Just a Lurker:** Wow, that's fucking scary

.

And, the reason why the news was so hot was… because of a few select items found within the [coffin] that Choi Kyung-sik had purposely left behind at the scene.

In fact, in addition to their own items the servants had each picked up, there were miscellaneous items that could not be identified as belonging to a specific owner. Choi Kyung-sik seemed to have taken a few of those keepsakes while clearing through the [coffin].

Among those items, Choi Kyung-sik utilized a button on a [Red Lotus] combat uniform. Most of the equipment was stained with hydrochloric acid, but some did not melt completely and retained their shape. Choi Kyung-sik had broken off a button before exploding the mansion. I had no idea he

would do such a thing, so I was surprised when I heard his later explanation.

Choi Kyung-sik's intended bewilderment scheme worked better than expected. The combat suit wasn't one that would match others found in Geum Miyoung's mansion, and a close examination of the button would reveal that this was a true keepsake used by the [Red Lotus] guild. Still reeling from being shocked by Geum Miyoung, this would cause double the pain for Bae Jaemin.

Choi Kyung-sik, after raising his glasses with a finger, turned to my surprised self and said, "I wanted to see Jaemin-ie turn deep blue with fright–what a shame."

"He's completely absent from the public these days. Articles related to the [Red Lotus] seem to be blocked through the use of money for now, but it's only a matter of time."

"Oh~ There's Bae Jaeminie right now~"

Speak of the devil, the news channel filmed Bae Jaemin getting out of his car. On the screen, the Priest looked very pallid, surrounded by dozens of cameras. I checked Bae Jaemin's nervously blinking eyes and the rigid corners of his lips.

'I suppose he's tasted a bit of death, hasn't he? By now, he must have realized that, not only the contents of the coffin but also the slush funds Geum Miyoung was in charge of, have now all been stolen.'

With a wry smile, I stared at Bae Jaemin entering a building.

That building he entered was the prosecution's investigation quarters. OF course, he was simply there to supplement the investigation as a witness and wasn't a suspect, but I quite like how he walked away from the reporters with their outstretched mics like a sinner.

After watching until that point, Kim Olim told us, "Lim Jisoo is currently staying at the XX hotel. It seems she's meeting often with Ryu

Hyerin.”

At those words, Woo Ragi tilted his head and asked, “Hey. Rather than Lim Jisoo, but… Who is it… That Assassin. Have we heard anything about him?”

The veiled assassin who stole Woo Ragi’s last breath had yet to be identified nor was it easy to find information about him. However, Kim Olim made a fairly optimistic prediction, “That will be revealed as we monitor Lim Jisoo. According to Park Hoseok, all the culprits agreed to gather and meet up if the [Red Lotus] case becomes a bigger issue.”

Jung Garam was the one to respond. He held his chin and smiled happily, as if he were recalling something pleasant. However, the words that tumbled out of his mouth were pretty awful. “That’s right. Also, that meeting is a little… Compulsory? At least that’s what Park Hoseok said when I asked him; his words were a bit short since I cut off his tongue in the middle of his confession. They must have signed a contract with a huge risk for breaking secrecy. Like a vow of obedience or something.”

Kim Olim, after listening to Jung Garam, smiled and looked back at Seo Dawon, “I guess Lim Jisoo is still making a living using your skills.”

“Hm.” Seo Dawon didn’t show much of an expression; I couldn’t understand what that meant, so I continued to look alternatingly between the two.

Choi Kyung-sik, who had been silent all this while, also gave his two cents, “I’m saying this because you mentioned it: aren’t Lim Jisoo and Guildmaster’s skill combo and chains quite similar?”

“Lim Jisoo was the one who copied Seo Dawon quite diligently. Perhaps even half of Lim Jisoo’s skill base utilized skill trees devised by Seo Dawon. [Retrograde] has so many skill branches, so two skill trees can’t be that similar by chance. The probability is similar to getting first place in the lottery.”

I looked at the Mage while listening to Kim Olim’s cynical tyrade. Though he was the one being plagiarized, that seemed to have no significant impact on the Mage.

However, when he met my gaze, Seo Dawon’s words did not hide his ridicule, “Lim Jisoo is a little too…simple to be a Mage. She has no sense of aesthetics.”

As he said that, he unfurled a golden magic circle over his hand; after calling forth another magic circle within, he began to draw all sorts of different patterns.

I had no idea if that was some great feat or not, but Choi Kyung-sik suddenly sighed deeply and flinched a little, “You’re able to use another subclass’s magic simultaneously? Don’t you usually summon several low-class magic circles before moving onto another high-level spell.”

I had no idea what he was talking about, but Choi Kyung-sik’s tone clearly conveyed his feelings of respect for his guildmaster.

I stared at Seo Dawon’s palm, wondering if those two spinning magic circles were really that great. I couldn’t understand, no matter how hard I stared.

In anycase, Seo Dawon shook his hands a couple of times before answering, “That’s impossible for Lim Jisoo. [Logic] or something simple like that would have been better for her than [Retrograde].” [3]

Jung Garam, giggling, added, “Because of Hyung, there were reams of Mages that rushed forward into your skill tree path. After all, after you debuted, the [Logic] subclass was utterly demolished.”

Become a Patron!

TL: Wow, I think Seo Dawon was actually pissed at Jung Garam there!

Lim Jisoo! We'll learn more about her in days to come!

Footnotes

1. unsub = Unknown subject. The forums are using slang for criminal/culprit. Unsub is a common slang used in true crime…so I thought it was appropriate.
2. PHS is, ofc, Park Hoseok.
3. Logic, here, really means "obeyeing the laws or rationality of the world." I couldn't really figure out which was snappier: logic or physics…lmao. I went with Logic. This is in direct conflict with Retrograde, which, in turn, means going back on logic. Aka backwards rationality. Logic, in this scenario, means that the magic 'makes sense.' I'm assuming that Retrograde is a magical subclass that defies conventionality.

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Chapter 291

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While listening in on their conversation, I wondered why Seo Dawon had been feuding with Lim Jisoo for such a long time, “So… How did you come to know Lim Ji-soo?”

Seo Dawon answered without hesitation, “We crashed into each other because of a commission. Lim Jisoo’s business usually starts with collusion and fraud. Her victims saved up money and hired me.”

As soon as the Mage finished speaking, Kim Olim frowned slightly, recalling that event. “A few low-profile Users won some scenario rewards through their innovative ideas, and Lim Jisoo decided to visit and extort them after hearing rumors about them. Our request involved protecting the client’s safety until the auction start date for their item.”

I was a little surprised to hear that [Red Lotus] also participated in mercenary work. Woo Ragi must have also been a part of the guild during that request because, as he leaned against the back of the sofa and rested his chin crookedly at the top, he said with an arrogant expression, “That was one of the last chances to hire the [Red Lotus] for hundreds of millions.”

Kim Olim smiled bitterly, “Actually, it wasn’t long after the guild was founded; so, we were running at a deficit. We tried to meet with many investors, but everyone thought the way we wanted to clear the ‘Scenario’ was too reckless. That’s why we also took on part-time jobs as well.”

“We also carried people through dungeons many times, too. Going around all day with pieces of shits who are more useless than a dog’s penis… Haah.”

I was quite surprised at their statements. I knew that [Red Lotus] had a sensational debut from the beginning and immediately became one of the large guilds, so I didn't think they would have suffered from a lack of money.

Seo Dawon looked at my wide eyes and said mischievously, "Should we have just sold fans?"

"Hey!" I looked askance at the mage, but I wasn't too offended by his words. Rather, I wanted to hear more about the [Red Lotus]. I docilely closed my mouth.

The Mage slowly continued the story, "At that time, Lim Jisoo was a ranker Mage well known for utilizing the [retrograde] tree. She was more recognized and famous than us, who had just become Users. Honestly, though, rather than her skills… she was more notorious for committing all sorts of dirty deeds in the name of money."

Kim Olim also pitched in, "During that commission, Lim Jisoo surrounded us with dozens of assassins. At first, she told Seo Dawon that if he handed her his client, she would spare his life. Of course, that would have been a lie as well. Few people survived throughout the course of Lim Jisoo's crimes."

"Then… Did you all win there? Three against dozens of opponents?"

"The client also fought as well. It was about 40 against 10."

Even so, the assassins still outnumbered them by four times; the fact that they survived was a huge deal.

However, Woo Ragi clicked his tongue as if he weren't satisfied, "We should have stolen away Lim Jisoo's breath at that time. Because we needlessly let her go…"

"You sustained injuries. Things would have been difficult if we hadn't given over Lim Jisoo in hostage negotiations."

“Tsk.”

Woo Ragi was seriously injured during the fight, but it seems they had escaped the siege by taking Lim Jisoo prisoner. With twinkling eyes, Garam asked his guildmaster, “Hyung, you probably fought her 1 v 1 right?”

It was Kim Olim who answered, “No–he was against 10 others. If it had only been Lim Jisoo, he would have dealt with her a long time ago.”

“Kyaa~ As expected from [Red Lotus]’s guildmaster.”

“You didn’t get hurt back then?” I asked, startled; the servants’ gazes lingered on me for a while. Other than the perpetually smiling Seo Dawon, the others’ expression seemed to convey that I was being unnecessarily fussy over the Mage. Honestly, though, it’s not like I’m wrong to ask something like this…

‘Ugh, they’re acting as if they’re looking at a couple’s overt PDA…!’

I lowered my head, embarrassed; Seo Dawon replied in an affectionate tone, “I wasn’t hurt. Ragi had attracted an unnecessary deluge of attacks because of his reckless dashing.”

“What do you mean reckless? I created opportunities for you.”

“I see–no self-reflection at all, even though you got injured enough to be unable to raise a sword for a while.” Kim Olim looked at Ragi with a stern expression. Woo Ragi avoided her eyes–a rare behavior for the swordsman.

Looking at Woo Ragi now, I faintly recalled how he had helped me to escape Koo Hui-seo’s nightmare by cutting off his neck or his arm.

Not long ago, my memories of that day gradually returned. Should I say that, afterwards, I reevaluated my thoughts on Woo Ragi? Though everything he said was still annoying and despicable, I believed he was able to secure such a stable position in the guild due to his dependable personality.

Kim Olim's thoughts must run similar to mine as, though she still stared at Ragi with a stern face, she seemed to be genuinely worried for him. Seo Dawon looked alternatingly between the two with a soft expression before turning towards me again, "Because of that incident, we earned Lim Jisoo's grudge. Naturally, she sent assassins to our families and sent us photos– threats. Well, in the end, I guess I was the one to act first and kill her younger brother."

"… Then, have you been threatened with assassination ever since then?" I asked, fed up with Lim Jisoo's persistent obsession.

However, all three shook their heads.

"No, those gradually diminished."

"Perhaps it became difficult to hire an assassin once the [Red Lotus] started to grow in size. Not even an idiot would challenge a commission he was sure to fail."

"We also did our best to consistently run our own schemes… Well, by the time the [Tower of Command] raid commenced, things were quiet enough that we almost forgot about it."

Lim Jisoo probably not only had difficulty hiring assassins who could match [Red Lotus]'s notoriety but also probably felt that she may die if the [Red Lotus] continued to grow. Perhaps that was when she joined hands with Bae Jaemin.

"But… How did Lim Jisoo and Bae Jaemin come to work together? Did the two have history together?" I asked–I had long been curious about this.

Seo Dawon closed his mouth, briefly contemplating.

"If we grab Ryu Hyerin this time around, we can ask her." Kim Olim stated coldly.

Flapping his feet and laying back on the sofa, Woo Ragi said almost sarcastically, "Or, we could ask Bae Jaemin directly."

“If you catch Jaemin-ie, you’ll hand him over to me right?” Jung Garam grinned as he joined in on the conversation. His eyes gave their usual sparkle–his cheeks healthily flushed–at the thought of inflicting cruelties.

At that, Choi Kyung-sik made a request to the young Assassin, “Garam-ah, I’m sorry, but can you leave the corpse in a good state? There are a few experiments I’d like to conduct.”

“Mmmmmm~ Fine. There are ways to break him without cutting into him.”

“Good.” Choi Kyung-sik’s face brightened.

As expected of a member of [Red Lotus]; Choi Kyung-sik also looked forward to Bae Jaemin’s end. What would the downfall of a man always supported by the media look like? Will he kneel at their feet and beg, just as the previous revenge targets had done before?

“The Geum Miyoung case is sure to shake that side; there will definitely be some action,” Seo Dawon calmly said. Every servant, even those that seemed lost in thought, turned towards him. He continued, “However, Bae Jaemin won’t be able to do a single thing. There will surely be a response–as [HaHae] was able to avoid tax investigations so far; it’ll take weeks to resolve this suspicion. So, Ryu Hyerin is more likely to move on his behalf. Even the move to meet with Lim Jisoo shows that Ryu Hyerin is currently acting as his proxy. Thus, we’ll have to target Ryu Hyerin as our next target.”

I had to hold myself back from reading the Mage’s [current mood] when I saw his emotionless demeanor. I didn’t want to do something like that.

Meanwhile, Seo Dawon calmly explained his trap to capture Ryu Hyerin, “Lim Jisoo has a habit of enjoying the nightlife. As such, the hotel she’s staying at is located near a private club. I believe Ryu Hyerin is also aware of Lim Jisoo’s proclivities, so the Priest arranged the living situation in that manner.”

“Nightlife…?”

“According to our investigations… She apparently likes to drink with several men, though we aren’t entirely too sure what happens inside the room,” Then, as if he felt a little disappointed, he added, “I was going to try and arrange an infiltration by disguising you as a receptionist, but the club’s interview process is quite tricky. It’s impossible for Lee-kyung-ie to infiltrate there. The building’s also enveloped by artifacts, so simple skills like ‘warp’ don’t work inside.”

“Still, once we enter the club, Lim Jisoo won’t be able to use her skills, so I don’t think it’d be difficult to overpower her.”

“Lim Jisoo is always accompanied by more than 20 subordinates when she goes clubbing. I decided on forgoing capturing her there since the summoning skill won’t work inside either.” With that said, Seo Dawon took a moment’s pause–one beat–before continuing, “Instead, we’ll wait for Ryu Hyerin to exit after they enter this building. Since these clubs are known for *that sort of activity,* I believe Ryu Hyerin will, for her image, disguise herself or visit during low foot traffic hours.”

“Then…”

“Since she’ll strive to meet and leave without being conspicuous as much as possible…she probably won’t bring much protection detail. That’ll make our approach easier.”

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: I’m… so soft for the oldest three of the Red Lotus guild being soft for each other. Tbh, if Woo Ragi can get over his homophobia, the Seo Dawon/Kim Olim/Woo Ragi/Choi Lee-kyung ship might be amazing.

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Chapter 292

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In accordance with Seo Dawon’s plan, we decided to monitor how Ru Hyerin would approach Lim Jisoo. The task was divided between two teams; Garam-ie and Choi Kyung-sik would each play a role in observing Lim Jisoo’s movements for 12 hours.

And, in order to aid our monitoring, we unpacked and moved some luggage into another hotel near the one Lim Jisoo was staying in. We went through all this trouble in order to fully maximize the use of the servants’ skills.

The servants stated they could use their skills if they were some distance away from me, their master, but the farther they were the less potent their skills would be. Furthermore, their minds would be beset by mental stress.

I had never heard of this penalty before, but none of the servants raised any objections or contradictions when Seo Dawon informed me of this limitation. In order words, he spoke the truth: the further the others were from me, the less capable they’d be. Everyone was already aware of this.

In addition, the flimsier our bond, the less they could exert their abilities.

In other words, Seo Dawon and Lackey may rarely experience headaches, stress, and loss of concentration even if they were quite far away from me, but other servants, especially Choi Kyung-sik and Woo Ragi considering their low ‘friendliness’ or ‘affection’ stat, would be nervous even if they were just outside the range of my home.

I was surprised by their unexpected weakness. “What do you mean by ‘lose concentration?'”

“We kept thinking about you.”

“…What?” When I heard Seo Dawon’s answer, I couldn’t help but be conscious of the gazes looking at me for some reason.

However, Seo Dawon adopted a serious tone, abandoning his usual joking demeanor. “It’s true. I keep thinking, ‘I’ll have to return by your side quickly.’ Worries like, ‘What if someone infiltrates your home while I’m gone and put you in danger…’ fill my head. I couldn’t concentrate on my own tasks because I kept checking your status constantly.”

“That must have been…difficult,” I answered, bluntly.

‘Was this why the servants always seemed so strangely insecure and restless…?’

However, even after listening to the Mage’s explanation, I couldn’t believe that Choi Kyungsik, who always smiled so vaguely, or Woo ragi, who became annoyed whenever our eyes met, would think like that.

‘Anxiety… Perhaps Seo Dawon feels that sort of emotion because it’s him… Choi Kyung-sik or Woo Ragi probably feels annoyance…’

I stared at those two in disbelief, but neither seemed interested in me. They remained still, neither denying nor confirming this new revelation. So, I focused on the operation planning that followed the lull in the conversation.

Anyway, because of that penalty, Choi Kyung-sik had to stay with me to prevent him from deteriorating to uselessness. The speed at which we overpower Ryu Hyerin was the key to this plan, so any mistakes or poor concentration had to be prevented as much as possible.

There was much foot traffic around the hotels here; our movements may be filmed or we may attract witnesses. So, to increase the chances of success without consequences, we considered observing from within the Royal Palace hotel–Lim Jisoo’s hotel. However, since there was a possibility that Bae Jaemin would make a surprise visit, we eventually

decided on another hotel just 3 kilometers away from the Royal Palace hotel.

I decided to speak my mind, “This feels similar to the Park Hoseok case–the way we follow and observe the target.”

“Unlike then, though, Ryu Hyerin will already be aware of strange happenings and possible dangers, so she’s sure to be wary. Furthermore, the fact that her power–her attribute–is opposite to yours is something to be cautious about.” Kim Olim answered as she unfurled the map and checked the nearby roads.

After contemplating her words, I realized that Lady Luck blessed us in many ways when we captured Park Hoseok. We hadn’t visited the Jeju Island villa during the holiday season, so there were few people around at that time. The fact that Park Hoseok actually came exactly as he was summoned–to a location we specially chose–meant that we were halfway to success by the beginning of our operation.

However, our current operation would take place in some of the busiest locations in the hub; there were many department stores and restaurants near the hotel, so people wandered around day and night. Furthermore, as was usual in most downtown districts, public officials from the official User’s Association regularly patrolled the area as security detail. If Ryu Hyerin called for help, we would risk being exposed.

I kept looking at the crossed-out routes and asked Kim Olim, “About Ryu Hyerin… How is she at combat?”

“It’s meaningless to ask about her combat capabilities. Ryu Hyerin is a High-Priest who can use [Holy Descent] [1] … If she attempts to flee while in that state, it’ll be troublesome. As you can glean from the skill’s name, she would literally be under God’s protection.”

Since I was ignorant of a High Priest’s Power, I couldn’t even recklessly state that we’d be fine due to Kim Olim’s outstanding abilities.

Furthermore, I was concerned that no other servant refuted the Paladin's words. In particular, Seo Dawon remained silent and continuously stared at the map; I could feel that he was seriously considering that possibility.

However, I still strived to speak whatever came to mind–after all, I wanted to be of some help as well. "Then, why don't you get rid of the chauffeur first–just like you did with Geum Miyoung?"

"Ryu Hyerin, she… She usually drives herself around. She makes it a hobby."

"R-Really?"

"And, if she's trying to keep her visit with Lim Jisoo a secret, there's an even greater chance she'll travel alone… Though, that's only a guess." Kim Olim said quickly, as if she knew everything about Ryu Hyerin.

If I were ignorant, I would have thought the Paladin joined Ryu Hyerin's fan club…They must have had a pretty close relationship before the guild's downfall. Furthermore, her expression while gazing at the map was so ferocious, I couldn't help but flinch. Her current energy couldn't be compared to when she killed Geum Miyoung.

'In a way, more so than Seo Dawon, Kim Olim is…'

…How should I put this… She looked even more emotionally agitated. I suppose one could describe her fierce anger as a gripping obsession.

I looked at Kim Olim through the corner of my eye; crazily enough, Seo Dawon, who had been engaged to Ryu Hyerin, was calmer than the Paladin. As soon as he felt my gaze, the Mage opened his mouth. Looking towards Choi Kyung-sik, he asked, "Is there anything you can make that can follow a target–like a familiar?"

Choi Kyung-sik looked completely flustered at that question. He crumpled his brows, "I'm an Alchemist! Are you serious?"

"You've really improved your whining skills."

“Well, I could make a mini-golem. That’s no big deal, but… The contraption will definitely stand out too much. Also, its durability will be weak enough that even Ryu Hyerin could trample it beneath her feet.”

“……”

Everyone in the living room fell silent; no decent methods arose from our brainstorming session.

‘So, if Ryu Hyerin were to run away, it’ll be disadvantageous for us, right?’

Looking down at the map, I recalled my servant’s conversation. Then, without thinking much, I opened my mouth. “Hey, this is just my idea, but…”

“……”

“Rather than worrying about Ryu Hyerin escaping… Mmmn… Why not entice her to chase after us? So, we can throw a bait that’ll secretly place Ryu Hyerin on our trail.”

However, when the servants’ red eyes simultaneously looked towards me, I felt a bit awkward and wondered if I had said anything wrong.

Woo Ragi asked bluntly, “What would be the bait?”

“T-That’s… Ummm…”

While I stammered at Woo Ragi’s words, it was Choi Kyung-sik who unexpectedly answered, “Why not summon Guildmaster-nim for a little while as lure? We just need to be clever and not directly expose his face– just a few side profiles or his back.”

“Huh?”

“If I were Ryu Hyerin-ssi, I would become curious and follow in secret.”

However, I thought differently. ‘If I see someone who looks like my fiance–the fiance that I killed with my very own hands… If that were me, I’d never follow because I would be so scared…’

However, the servants nodded their heads as if they thought it was a good idea.

“Knowing her personality, she’ll definitely do more than follow.” Kim Olim mumbled to herself before shutting her mouth.

Seo Dawon lowered his eyes as if he were contemplating and tapped his fingers on the table. “I’m alright with acting as the lure, but I can’t make her feel threatened… She can’t sense that anything is off with the situation. Ryu Hyerin must not contact anyone else or give up in the middle of her chase.”

At those words, Jung Garam raised his hand, “How about using some drugs? Like making her feel momentarily fuzzy?”

Choi Kyung-sik agreed, “I do have a few [Seductions] left.”

Seo Dawon continued to contemplate for a while longer before shaking his head and explaining, “That’s good, but, we’ll have to lure Ryu Hyerin to a deserted place… Specifically, we’ll need something to definitely lower her vigilance and induce curiosity within her.”

As I listened to the mage, I looked down at Lackey, who lounged by my feet as it assembled toy blocks.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung! Is adding to the planning sessions and giving his own opinions!

Also, is it just me? or Do other people notice that Choi Kyung-sik is often the one to give Lee-kyung a sense of agency or validate his opinions… Even if Lee-kyung doesn't notice.

Footnotes

1. Descent as in 'God' descending upon the mortal plane.

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Ryu Hyerin stood in front of the VIP room. The waiter that guided her here knocked lightly on the door, which opened swiftly.

“Hyerin-ie~ You’re here?” The open door revealed Lim Jisoo sitting in the center of the room like a queen.

And, sitting around her were slender-looking men acting quite coyly. They were probably acting that way while eyeing the pile of money on the table.

‘Her taste is just….’ Ryu Hyerin inwardly clicked her tongue as she stepped into the room. Of course, on the surface, her smile was not marred.

As Ryu Hyerin approached, a man clinging to Lim Jisoo’s side carefully made space. Lim Jisoo giggled and hugged Ryu Hyerin’s shoulder with one arm; in turn, the priest smiled and settled down by her side.

Lim Jisoo spat the cigar she was roughly chewing onto the floor and laughed, “Is the investigation into Jaemin-ie finished today?”

“Yes. He’ll come to see you soon, Unni.”

“Hell, why should he come? It can just be you! I feel frustrated whenever I see his face–he always looks like a dead man walking.”

“Haha…”

Lim Jisoo always complained that Bae Jaemin did not have an ounce of softness and friendliness about him, but if one took a closer look, the men surrounding her were similar to Bae Jaemin… A natural smile formed on Ryu Hyerin's face–that was truly hilarious.

When the Priest smiled faintly, the man who had moved for her handed her a glass. When Lim Jisoo saw that, she narrowed her eyes. "Darling, are you wagging your tail at Hyerin-ie right now?"

"Of course not, noona. I'm only giving her this because she's your friend."

Ryu Hyerin shook her head and refused the drink. She patiently watched Lim Jisoo toy around with the man while pretending to be upset. When Lim Jisoo saw Ryu Hyerin's disaffected appearance despite the Mage's cajoling and caressing of the attending males, she frowned. "Should I summon some for you, too?"

"What? Ah, no… I'm fine."

"Is that because of Bae Jaemin? He does whatever he wants behind your back, too."

"Haha…" Ryu Hyerin sighed inwardly at Lim Jisoo's insensitive words. '…Is she telling me to piss off because she wants to play around today?'

'No–honestly, she might not even have anything to tell me.'

They had been able to coast well since Lim Jisoo re-entered Korea and was able to use the information her syndicate gathered. Through her network, they were able to find out Koo Hui-seo's hospitalization records–his unonscious state. That was all due to the large number of spies from her criminal organization that she had planted in the [Red Dragon] guild.

However, now it was hard to obtain any new information. Despite this, Lim Jisoo wasn't wary of Koo Hui-seo at all; after all, she was able to command half of Koo Hui-seo's security personnel as she wished.

Once he heard that, Bae Jaemin relaxed and began to focus on Geum Miyoung's case. He had even placed his appointment with Choi Lee-kyung on the back burner.

'Lim Jisoo confidently stated that she could kidnap or remove Koo Hui-seo if he became even more of a bother, but…'

But, even if she had half of his bodyguard detail in her grasp, Ryu Hyerin still thought they would not be able to easily penetrate inside Koo Hui-seo's mansion. However, both Bae Jaemin and Lim Jisoo thought it would be a victory anyway if Koo Hui-seo was locked away to the point he could not leave his home.

Eventually, with no fruit to show for her day's work, Ryu Hyerin rose from her seat as she watched Lim Jisoo entertain herself. Lim Jisoo glanced at the Priest as she stood but didn't make any efforts to dissuade her from leaving. "Going?"

"Yes. I'll come again next time."

"Why go through all the trouble? Just contact me if there's anything unusual happening."

As expected, the woman simply wanted to empty her brain and play around for the time being. Ryu Hyerin lowered her head, trying to not show her irritation at wasting her time. "Thank you."

"Should I tell the kids to ready a car for you?"

"No. I've brought something." Ryu Hyerin chuckled as she turned around. As soon as she left the room and closed the door, her black hair began to turn blond.

When Ryu Hyerin touched an artifact called the [Image Transformation Ring] with her finger, her hair turned completely golden. Thereupon, she took sunglasses and a hat out of her inventory and put them on. She then descended to the underground parking lot through the emergency stairs.

"……?"

However, as soon as she arrived at that parking lot, she saw a man's wide back through the tint of her sunglasses.

She looked at the man for a moment–a strange feeling that she couldn't quite pinpoint rose within her. Ignorant of her stare, the man loaded small boxes into a black van.

'I feel like I've seen him somewhere before…?'

However, as soon as the man turned his head towards her, Ryu Hyerin, for some reason she couldn't understand, turned her head the other way and walked towards her own parked car. Perhaps she turned her head reflexively because she thought he was a reporter or an acquaintance.

Nonetheless, she couldn't shake the feeling that that wasn't the case. Eventually, Ryu Hyerin got into her car and looked through the window at the man who seemed farther than before.

'In the past…Hm. Well, I think I'd remember if I took a closer look.'

However, the man soon sat in the driver's seat–it seems he had finished loading his luggage. Ryu Hyerin was shocked to see the man's profile.

'He looks so similar…'

He looks so similar to Seo Dawon.

Ryu Hyerin unwittingly started the car. She felt so nervous–she urgently felt she needed to block the car and check the man's face.

However, the van quickly left the parking lot; Ryu Hyerin hurriedly stepped on the accelerator. The van exited the parking lot without any hesitation and began driving on the road outside. Ryu Hyerin hesitated for a moment, but she was overcome by a strange impulse and eventually followed the man.

Fortunately, the man escaped the downtown after a little while and stopped in a shopping district that saw a lot of foot traffic. The man took a few small boxes with him and disappeared into a building. Ryu Hyerin recorded the van's license number with her cell phone.

'I'll ask Bae Jaemin to look it up.'

However, just as she was about to send a message, the man popped out of the building. Once again, he wasn't empty-handed.

She thought that she would be able to finally see his face properly now, but the man held a child who looked to be in their lower elementary school years. The issue here was that the child was stuck to the man's face, and she found it hard to peer at his features through the gaps. Ryu Hyerin felt somewhat disappointed when she saw the small child giving the man cheek kisses.

'Is he just someone that looks similar…?'

When it became clear that this person wasn't the Mage, Ryu Hyerin simply watched him buckle the child into the car.

'Well, I suppose it's strange for me to follow someone just because they look similar to Seo Dawon when I know the Mage is dead.' Ryu Hyerin deleted the picture of the van with a despondent heart. Still, even now, her gaze still continued to stray to the man.

'…Is he a married man?'

While 'Seo Dawon' wore a lot of accessories, that man only wore a simple ring on the fourth finger of his left hand.

'He was holding onto that child so affectionately, too… He's probably married.'

Those were the Priest's thoughts as she stared blankly at his car. Strangely, though, it felt like she was seeing Seo Dawon alive and married to someone else…even though she knew that was impossible.

Soon, the man placed his child in the passenger seat before carrying the rest of the boxes back into the building. Because his face was once again covered by the box stack, it was hard to see his features directly; Ryu Hyerin, though, remained still since she knew that he wasn't the Mage– merely a doppelganger. A strange sense of weakness took over her body.

'…I should return.'

In the end, Ryu Hyerin decided to start her car and erase today's idiotic stalking incident from her mind.

'Huh?'

However, still unable to tear away her lingering glances, the van's passenger door suddenly opened. The door that hid the man's child. It seemed he did not lock the door; after the child fumbled around a bit with yellow glove-covered hands, they eventually exited the car.

As she looked at the stumbling child, she was conscious of the fact that the van was parked close to the road. She automatically glanced at the building the man entered, but there was no movement at its entrance.

In addition, the child continued to walk forward. Cars often sped up on this section because the entrance to the eight-lane highway wasn't far away.

Ryu Hyerin watched anxiously as the child moved further from the van and even left the sidewalk. Eventually, she opened her car door and walked towards the child. "Excuse me…"

The child busily wriggled forward as if they never heard her voice.

While trying to call out to the yellow-hooded child, Ryu Hyerin reached out urgently to their small back just in case an accident may occur. She thought she should at least hold onto them for now. Since there was a big difference between the stride of an adult and a child, she was able to reach and scoop up the child with no difficulty.

'So light.'

And, when she pulled them up by their back, she was a little flustered by the unexpected lightness of the child. Still, fortunately, she was relieved that she could soon return the child to their rightful place.

"……!"

However, she almost screamed when the child turned around and peered up from beneath their hood–a skull with red eyes stared at her.

"What…..!"

"It's been a long time, Hyerin-ah."

However, before she could scream hysterically, she heard an unforgettable voice in her ears. She turned around reflexively and met cold, red eyes. Ryu Hyerin froze, shocked; the man's cold hand blocked her mouth. "I really missed you."

Ryu Hyerin stared at Seo Dawon, forgetting to breathe.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Lackey my baby~

Also, I know we're supposed to hate Lim Jisoo…but it's kinda boss the way she just shamelessly played around with her harem while ignoring Ryu Hyerin.

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‘…This can’t be possible.’

He’s a dead man. She had pushed him away with her own two hands. She often dreamed of a Seo Dawon that had come back from the dead to hurt her, but…

Unbelievable–Ryu Hyerin raised her hands reflexively and groped the hand that was holding her face. Her fingertips felt the cold hard skin of a corpse, so different from a living human being.

‘Is that really…Seo Dawon?’ Ryu Hyerin raised her gaze and checked the Mage’s face again.

Red eyes, cold skin, and hatred seeping from his pupils. Ryu Hyerin could not deny that the person in front of her was a completely different existence than when he was alive.

Ryu Hyerin shed tears. However, those tears weren’t from fright. She didn’t even care how Seo Dawon reappeared before her. Her gaze contained all sorts of complicated emotions as she looked at the Mage.

He coldly laughed at her, “Tsk tsk, Hyerin-ah…”

“……”

“You’re still the same.”

Ryu Hyerin could not tear her eyes off the Mage as she listened to his chilly laugh. A broken, shattered feeling that she couldn’t fully comprehend flowed through her.

Simultaneously, she sensed a disgusting smell and a nauseating discomfort pierce her nose. It felt familiar: the dead she had trampled to a second death like bugs in the dungeon…the peculiar, putrid stench of the dirty undead… She could feel all of that from Seo Dawon’s hand.

Black burns even began to appear at the edges of Seo Dawon’s palms where it covered Ryu Hyerin’s mouth. This phenomenon always occurred when things that went against the power of nature invaded a High Priest’s divine authority by entering their space. Just by touching her, the ultimate sign of eternal depravity dissipated into ashes.

A sign that Seo Dawon… actually became an undead.

Ryu Hyerin shuddered.

Clack–!

Seo Dawon ignored the goose bumps raised along her forearm and flicked his fingers lightly.

She immediately felt a severe dizziness; when she closed and opened her eyes, she was in a desert-like field and felt few other human presences. The mage probably warped her to a deserted location.

Afterwards, the Mage pulled away from Ryu Hyerin as if he had touched something unpleasant. With one brush of his magic, his damaged hands slowly began to repair.

Ryu Hyerin looked blankly at that sight before laughing uncontrollably, “Ha… Hahaha! You’ve become an undead…?”

Seo Dawon looked at her quietly, no answer given.

Ryu Hyerin once held a delusion that one day Seo Dawon, who somehow survived miraculously, might come to find her. However, even in her delusions, she never imagined a scenario in which Seo Dawon was revived as an undead.

‘That man is an undead?!’ Ryu Hyerin burst into laughter the more she thought about it; she took a step closer to the mage. “Just what… How broken are you?”

“……”

“Dawon-Oppa, for you to choose something like that…”

“……”

“Did you really hate me that much?” Ryu Hyerin, filled with anticipation, looked at Seo Dawon. However, he showed no signs of emotional agitation.

Of course, Ryu Hyerin had guessed that, under that calm face, indignation and contempt would be bubbling inside. A person who had been at the peak of all Users had become a monster.

After raiding with Seo Dawon in dungeons over several years, Ryu Hyerin was well aware of the difference between Users and Monsters. Obviously, monsters were powerful; a monster’s natural power was the reason why they raided with parties of numerous Users. It was more advantageous to face them as a group rather than to initiate a fight one-on-one.

However, as the number of people and the User’s level increased, even monsters would eventually be trampled underneath a User’s feet. Once a method to clear a monster or boss has been found, the monster would be

reduced to easy item drops or a source of experience. Even Aestheya, the boss of the [Second Company] dungeon, the most dangerous dungeon before [Tower of Command], merely became a supplier of reinforcement materials for accessories.

That arrogant man, who knows that fact better than anyone else, wants to kill his murderers enough to choose to lose his own ego? To think that man who believed in his limitless potential would shackle himself and become a slave to the system?

Ryu Hyerin grasped at her chest; her heart felt like it would explode. She smiled at Seo Dawon before opening her arms wide, “Kill me… No, you probably don’t want to kill me so simply, do you?”

“……”

“But, what should I do? I’m so happy right now. Dawon-Oppa came all the way here to kill little old me–just me. I’m so…”

“……”

“So, so very happy.”

She was nothing to him when he was alive, but she couldn’t believe that she became one of his goals after death. He never looked properly at her until the moment he died; the humiliation and despair she felt all this while seemed to be washed away by this single encounter.

Ryu Hyerin looked at the Mage with elation and contempt in her eyes. Almost as if she had expected the most miserable–the most pitiful, for he had lost everything–man in this world to shoot herself.

However, when she blinked, she found that the Mage wasn’t glaring at her. He didn’t even react to her taunts.

Just as he had done in the past, Seo Dawon stood back upright and head high as he looked at her. He burst into laughter when his eyes met hers

under the light of the ominous red moon. More than hate, his gaze conveyed his sneer. “Why should I?”

“What?”

“Why would I kill you?” Seo Dawon laughed as if he had heard an incredibly amusing joke. He retreated as many steps as she took towards him.

Ryu Hyerin read in Seo Dawon’s clear smile that he felt no inferiority complex from appearing before her in an undead state.

While she paused her steps, he said as if he were driving a wedge into her, “You’re not at my level.”

“…What?”

The Mage slowly began to melt into thin air, as if he had been merely granting her some sage advice. At the same time, the chilling energy that filled this area gradually faded.

She became incredibly angry once she realized that Seo Dawon was actually disappearing before her eyes.

“[Divine Hold]!” She extended a rope of light straight towards the mage, but that rope, which aimed to circle around his ankle, broke midair and flailed in vain.

Ryu Hyerin gritted her teeth as she looked around the area for signs of the Mage–signs that he completely disappeared. Then, she quickly opened her inventory and called forth her staff. She looked around her car for a few minutes before shouting into the air, “…I’m not at his level? How dare someone who’s been reduced to an undead existence say I’m not at his level?!”

“……”

“Don’t make me laugh…! He must have run away in fear since he’s an undead man in front of a Priest. I’ve gotten stronger while you were dead,

laying cold in the ground! Come out now!” In the first place, Ryu Hyerin had no intention of dying even as she provoked the mage with open arms.

It would be difficult for an undead to make any sort of meaningful attack on a High Priest; plus, she had enormous resistance against most magical attacks since she now wore a top-notch armor, the [Amazoness Armor], underneath her clothes. She made those provocations after calculating her chances.

‘This time…’

Ryu Hyerin prepared for Seo Dawon’s attack by bringing her hands together, mimicking a Catholic prayer–the [Prisoner’s Blessing] formation.

As soon as she posed–hands held together as if in prayer–transparent wings descended behind her back for a moment before vanishing. Ryu Hyerin then began to cast powerful, holy buffs on her body. “**[All that is unclean under the moon, all that was buried under the earth and yet has risen again in denial of all that is moral reason. Please allow permission for this servant to call forth **your name*.*]**“

Her buff would cause great amounts of damage to undead creatures that came within a certain range.

A circle 10 meters in range from Ryu Hyerin’s feet, delineated by a golden line, began to shine. However, as soon as the buff was finished, a cold, dry wind brushed past her. Ryu Hyerin looked back for a moment in the direction of the bleak airflow but soon clenched her teeth and shouted another buff, “…**[Protect me from the open jaws of darkness].**“

Two bright crosses sprang up near her body; they soon began to rotate around her.

These crosses indicated that there was an undead approaching from an unknown location; the crosses were ready to guard her. However, the guardian signs were silent and still, as if they had found no target. Slightly relieved, Ryu Hyerin recited her last buff, “[**Save me from this conceited evil**.]”

When she finished her most powerful buff, the [Holy Descent], a sudden ray of light pierced through the black sky.

And, amid that brilliant light, a beautiful angel slowly appeared. With both eyes closed, the angel landed next to the Priest.

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TL: Why does Ryu Hyerin look so excited to be hated by Dawon? Ughhh. Goosebumps

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Chapter 295

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When their feet alighted upon the ground, the angel summoned circular blades in both hands, their fingers gripping the handles. Only after the weapons were perfectly positioned in their hands did that ‘Celestial Being’ from another dimension–summoned by Ryu Hyerin–open their eyes. The eyes were pure white with no pupils.

Eyes now wide open, the angel stared silently over Ryu Hyerin’s shoulder. She turned her head quickly, looking around. “…What are you?”

A pale man carrying the skeleton she had seen earlier stood in the distance.

He wasn’t Seo Dawon. Soon, Ryu Hyerin remembered that she had seen the man’s face in the recent past–actually, she had never seen that face in person but she remembered those features in the information dossier she had handed over to Bae Jaemin. “Are you… Choi Lee-kyung?”

When Ryu Hyerin spoke, the angel spread their arms and quickly began to rush towards Choi Lee-kyung. The Priest squinted her eyes and looked towards the battlefront.

“…[Kim Olim].”

However, when a familiar name tumbled from the man’s lips, her eyes opened wide. An unbelievable sight unfolded before her.

* * *

After Ryu Hyerin used her [Holy Descent], a metallic, fishy taste began to surge into my mouth. ‘No way… Blood?’

I pressed a hand to my mouth just in case; I could feel Seo Dawon staring down at me. When I raised my eyes to look at him, I saw that his expression, which remained undistorted even in Ryu Hyerin’s presence, was unusually stiff.

“Lee-kyung-ah.”

“…Wait a minute. Summoning comes first,” I swallowed the blood and clenched my teeth. Meanwhile, the huge angel stared at me, spreading an enormous amount of bloodlust.

“[Kim Olim].” When I managed to call the Paladin’s name, the stomachache became worse, but nothing could be done. Kim Olim also looked back at me anxiously before looking straight at the angel that rushed towards us.

[A parasitic existence that lost its name…]

The angel, who ran at a high speed, smiled; even though it was quite a distance away, a strange voice permeated the air to reach my ears. I had no idea what those words meant, but I could clearly read the thick, viscous bloodthirst crammed into that voice.

Goosebumps raised over my arms briefly, but I regained my composure by looking at the Knight-like back in front of me.

“[Rho-Aias].”

Clank–!

As soon as Kim Olim was summoned, she called forth her divine instrument; the angel’s sword and her shield collided forcefully. A strong

wind blew from the point of contact between those two; Seo Dawon quickly dragged me behind him.

Their match seemed to be quite even, but soon the Angel smiled crookedly and flapped their wings. Startlingly, Kim Olim's feet began to be pushed back.

Furthermore, that front wasn't the only issue.

"[Divine Hold]!"

[Clack Clack!]

[Master!]

Ryu Hyerin, who approached closer, reached her hand out to me! Fortunately, Lackey moved forward so I wasn't tangled by that rope of light, but Lackey was caught on my behalf. The area underneath its elbow was shattered into black ash, which crumbled and scattered.

When our eyes met, Ryu Hyerin shouted, "Choi Lee-kyung! Answer me! What have you done?!"

I frowned at her–she seemed to have lost all reason. I couldn't even afford to answer her questions. Though I spat out the blood pooling in my mouth, the ache at the pit of my stomach was getting worse.

'…Is this a High Priest's ability?'

Something was different about her compared to the other revenge targets. Her mere approach seemed to make my chest gradually crumple in on itself.

I turned on my status window; floating above me, the system sent several red warning alerts as if it had been waiting for me to activate the system.

[The current User, Choi Lee-kyung, is within range of high-grade holy attribute buffs.]

[This is the most incompatible attribute for those of your class.]

[Please exit the High Priest's [Holy Descent]'s range.]

[The consequential debuff will greatly reduce your attack power and stamina.]

[Pain will continue to increase due to continuous decline in stamina.]

.

.

On the other hand, Ryu Hyerin looked fine. Rather than fine, actually, I should say her movements were vigorous.

She stared at me, raised her staff, and aimed towards me. Following that, the blue gems embedded in her staff began to sparkle. Instinctively, I knew I shouldn't be hit by that skill.

"Lackey!" I mustered my will to call for Lackey; black smoke surrounded the skeleton's body and it transformed into its evolved [Skeleton Soldier] form.

Lackey held a hitherto unseen humongous butcher's knife; [1] The skeleton skillfully placed the blade diagonally across its body and blocked Ryu Hyerin's path towards me.

However, Ryu Hyerin snorted before swinging her glowing blue staff vertically. "[Armor Break]."

The intense light from the staff almost hit Lackey, but the skeleton avoided being hit in the center of its chest by quickly raising its weapon.

Even though the attack missed the vital point, its residual power still completely smashed the skeleton from its left shoulder to its cheek.

Ryu Hyerin stopped attacking for a moment before staring at me with narrowed eyes. She looked a little nervous, “Necromancer… Has this class always been like this…?”

“……”

She then looked back at Kim Olim, who was still clashing with her summoned angel.

Kim Olim was still on the defensive, barely paying attention to this side of the battlefield. Ryu Hyerin turned to me and Lackey again, looking between us as she smiled viciously, “You summoned Seo Dawon, too, right?”

“……”

“Can all the [Red Lotus] members be called?”

Although I didn’t answer, Ryu Hyerin seemed to have already made her own conclusions. She looked me up and down before smiling again, “Aha! So you must also be able to summon Jung Garam.”

“……”

“Then it all makes sense. That’s how you deceived Bae Jaemin.”

Though my body shrank from nervousness, I managed to lift my chin. Ryu Hyerin still stared at me cautiously as she continued to speak in a derisive tone, “By the way, it’s very strange. If you really signed a contract with all of the [Red Lotus] members, it would be best to summon them all right now to counter me…”

“……”

“Don’t tell me–you didn’t think you could stop me with that pile of bones, did you? Bring Seo Dawon back.”

Thwap–!

When my silence continued, Ryu Hyerin flicked her finger lightly; she was done with asking nicely. The crosses, which hovered around her like satellites, changed positions. They stopped moving around, disappeared before my eyes, before reappearing in a tight circle around my skeleton soldier.

Lackey flinched and retreated one step. However, as soon as it stepped back, white light exploded from one of the crosses.

Slice–!

After being hit by that ray of light, Lackey's head and neck were separated. Before I could even respond to her attack, the crosses teleported above my head.

Ryu Hyerin coldly said, "Summon him if you don't want to die."

When, once again, I gave no answer, she mumbled almost to herself, "Or… Can he only call one out at a time?"

It felt as if she were asking me, but her tone already indicated that she was certain of her hypothesis. I couldn't refute the Priest and could only clench my fists.

Instead of making my head fly away, Ryu Hyerin approached with cat-like steps. Seo Dawon needed to clutch my shoulder so I didn't stumble; the Priest had approached so close she could simply reach out and touch me.

She looked at my tense eyes and asked with a smile, "What will happen to Seo Dawon when you die?"

"……"

"Is it the end for him? …Mmm. Well, judging from your expression, that seems to be the case."

"……"

Ryu Hyerin muttered contemptuously, "Haah… What is this? Is he bluffing or something? He's totally nothing."

"……"

"It's funnier the more I think about it. If he revived as an undead, he should live out of my sight. With what confidence are you all appearing before me?" As she said that, Ryu Hyerin completely ignored me and turned to look at Kim Olim and the angel's battle. She must have perceived that, without a servant's help, I couldn't penetrate the protective aura surrounding her.

And, Kim Olim's situation wasn't so different from mine. Though the angel she was confronting also suffered small wounds, the two were completely covered with black ash, which was akin to her blood in her undead state.

The angel bled from both their cheeks and arms, but Kim Olim had black cracks all over her body. The two fiercely rushed at each other now, but one could anticipate a victor to arise soon.

And, at that moment…

While flexibly avoiding the heavy shield swings, the angel suddenly lowered his center and launched an irregular attack. Kim Olim tried to change her posture, but the Angel was faster; their blade struck her wrists.

With that attack, Kim Olim's shield–and the hand holding it–clattered to the ground; she tried to step backwards, but even that wasn't possible.

The angel dug into her chest, gathered together both hands, and broke through her armor; their hands protruded out her back.

"……!" Kim Olim opened her mouth, pained…but, perhaps she swallowed her tortured groans; no sounds came out of her mouth.

The anger stirred their hands around, in her body, as if they were enjoying her pain. Eventually, Kim Olim fell to one knee. The angel knelt with her, whispering mocking words.

[Your dirty, evil, last-ditch effort ends here.]

Then the Paladin's body, which shook and trembled, paused before falling towards the angel. Like a mimicry of a hug.

At that moment, I made brief eye contact with Kim Olim… She closed her raging, blazing eyes slowly. Only when she fell completely into the angel's arms did I breathe out the breath I had been holding.

"What to do, Choi Lee-kyung? It looks like I've won."

"……"

Ryu Hyerin looked back at me with a wide smile on her face.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: Jeez, the entitlement. Asking someone to call out his summon just so you can get some time with Seo Dawon. And I know the Servants are

essentially immortal, but….Ooof… I had sympathy pain for Kim Olim.

Also, omg, Lee-kyung's grown a lot. T_T I'm so proud.

Footnotes

1. The word ( ) was accompanied by a character ( ) to indicate that the author is using the slang term for "knife." This is a borrowed word from Japanese, referring to the word "blade" in that language. Generally, the character would be accompanied by other words to signify what sort of blade it is, but there's no such additional signifier in this sentence. As such, I'll just take the most common use of which is a 'kitchen' or 'butcher' knife. Of course, I could be wrong… I guess we'll figure out how the webcomic artist interprets 'blade.'

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Chapter 296

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“Now, call out Seo Dawon,” Ryu Hyerin said.

I only made eye contact with the female priest after confirming that Kim Olim had limply fallen into the arms of the angel. When Lackey stumbled my way and tried to block me from her gaze, her holy defenses flashed again. This time, Lackey’s left shin bone was smashed. I clenched my teeth as I looked at my collapsed skeleton.

“Don’t be so uselessly defiant. I don’t intend to kill you.”

“……”

Ryu Hyerin spoke softly and paused her attacks as if she were about to show me mercy. Furthermore, she approached me with an animated expression. “I want to see Seo Dawon again.”

She placed her staff underneath my chin. Though her words were phrased like a request, her actions implied that my refusal to cooperate would result in a broken neck.

When Ryu Hyerin aimed her staff at me, Seo Dawon exuded an eerie bloodthirst that made my back damp with sweat. However, he faithfully followed my ‘command’ and did not step forward.

I looked up at Ryu Hyerin. “Your opponent is Kim Olim.”

At those words, Ryu Hyerin looked surprised; she raised her staff with a smile. As the blue jewel at the head of her staff heated up, I felt searing pain as if the skin under my chin was being burnt. She mocked me as I tried to hold back my groans, “I said I wouldn’t kill you, didn’t I? That doesn’t mean I’ll leave you completely intact.”

“……”

“Or, is there a cooldown time for your skills? I can spare you the time for those to refresh.”

Cr–rrr-ick–!

Her relaxed smile soon disappeared due to a strange sound–one she couldn’t ignore–originating from behind her. The priest hurriedly looked back and was able to observe the scene I had already been watching…one step ahead of her.

[Krrrr–oh-oh-oh-oh…]

Kim Olim was biting at the angel’s uncannily bent neck with both eyes closed.

The angel tried to say something, but only the sound of escaping wind leaked from his throat–the very throat that the Paladin had already torn away. Their white, beautiful hands that had penetrated the Paladin’s back began to tremble.

When the angel’s blood-stained outer garment flew in the wind and swept before my nose… I thought it smelled incredibly sweet. Like fragrant dessert wine.

“W-What is this…!” Extremely flustered, Ryu Hyerin raised her staff towards Kim Olim.

Kim Olim finally opened her eyes and began to fish out the angel's arms that were still stuck in her body, one by one. Her open chest gradually healed and recovered, as if nothing had happened. The same was true of her severed hands; once again, firm and stable fingers appeared.

Kim Olim immediately grabbed her shield that had fallen onto the sand and mounted it behind her back. Meanwhile, the angel that Ryu Hyerin summoned convulsed on the ground. The paladin stared down at that disturbing figure and stepped on their body, rendering them immobile. She grabbed a long and beautiful wing with one hand.

Rrrippp–!

[———!]

Just like that, the Paladin ripped off the angel's right wing; she was bathed in the resulting fountain of blood. She raised her blood-soaked face and looked directly at Ryu Hyerin, "Back in the Tower of Command, we had to fight against Assassins who seemed to recover their health endlessly."

"……."

"I'll make you feel how I felt back then."

The Priest's face paled; however, she immediately stretched her hands out to me. "[Divine Hold]!"

She judged it best to take a meaningful hostage before Kim Olim could begin her full-fledged assault.

However, I had predicted this to some extent. I avoided the first rope of light; the second rope was blocked as Lackey's ginormous blade plunged into the ground.

Meanwhile, Kim Olim jumped high–almost as if she were flying–and landed just in front of the Priest. At the same time, Ryu Hyerin's guardian crosses began to rotate like crazy; the bright rays that had smashed Lackey into a mess of broken bones poured out endlessly.

However, Kim Olim blocked the attacks with her shield or nimbly avoided them, expending no wasted movement, while continuing to narrow her distance to her opponent. Ryu Hyerin raised her staff, frowning, as she began to activate some of her most powerful skills, "[**Oh merciful Goddess. If you feel at all sorry for this servant who is beset by a puppet of the night–**]"

As her first verse flowed from her lips, the dome-shaped light surrounding her became even more intense. This skill probably strengthened her holy barrier.

As the dome widened, I grabbed the now agonized Lackey and ran backwards. Ryu Hyerin chewed her lips when she saw me, but she soon chanted her next skill. "[**If you remember the name of this poor servant wandering in this den of odious evils and the original sin–**]"

As her second verse continued, not only did the size of her holy barrier increase but the number of barriers increased significantly as well. A total of 10 holy barriers began to attack the Paladin.

Ryu Hyerin did not stop there; she plunged her staff into the ground and invoked her last skill. "[**I beg you, listen to your servant's grief; please listen to this prayer.**]"

A brilliant light burst out from the point where the tip of the staff met the ground.

As the light subsided, Ryu Hyerin's body gradually floated away from the ground, and she became airborne. I stared at her in surprise, eyes wide open; angel wings unfurled behind her back. At that very moment, she truly resembled a heaven-sent apostle.

Crash–!

However, as soon as she rose into the air, Kim Olim rushed forward at a tremendous speed and hit the golden barriers the Priest had manifested.

The holy crosses began to chase and attack the Paladin, but Kim Olim was barely faster–they missed by a hair’s width.

Various missed attacks rained down on the desert sand, causing a flurry of white sand to be blasted here and there. Kim Olim slid on that shifting landscape and once again attacked the barriers.

Cr-rr-ack–!

As soon as the Paladin hit her second strike where she landed her first, the barrier gradually began to crack. Ryu Hyerin was no longer relaxed and shot full-fledged attacks of her own. “[Divine Punishment].”

Immediately behind Kim Olim’s back, above her head, below her feet, and right in front of her chest, four magical circles manifested; white lightning shot out from the centers of each circle, pelting the Paladin relentlessly.

In one attack, Kim Olim’s body melted–her flesh severely damaged.

My hands shook when I saw the gruesome sight of her white bones being exposed, but the Paladin was still able to lift her shield in that state. She finally extinguished the barrier and, eventually, Ryu Hyerin’s defenses collapsed as one side was crushed.

“How…” Anxiety gradually grew on the Priest’s face; she was utterly shocked that her powerful attack couldn’t stop Kim Olim.

The Paladin’s nearly sublimated skin regenerated bit by bit until she returned to her original state.

Perplexed, Ryu Hyerin looked between Kim Olim, who was approaching her, and me, who was standing far back. “D-Don’t make me laugh…How could an undead withstand my attack…”

Even as Ryu Hyerin fell into a hysterical panic, Kim Olim’s body was being restored; black smoke covered her wrists–the final injury healing site. Even though the Paladin must have felt extreme pain when she was wounded, she still maintained her dignified aura.

Ryu Hyerin used her barrier to launch a full-scale attack on her opponent, but Kim Olim didn’t avoid the oncoming attack and ran straight to the Priest. Ryu Hyerin must have wanted to buy time when Kim Olim dodged her attacks, but she had predicted wrong.

“Gasp…!” Ryu Hyerin, who needed time until she could use her next skill since she had just used a powerful ability, was helplessly struck by Kim Olim’s sword. Of course, the Priest was not felled with that one strike, but it was enough to slice off her left arm at the elbow.

Unable to pick up her arm, Ryu Hyerin had no choice but to quickly widen the distance between her and her opponent. Kim Olim did not bother matching her speed; the Paladin walked leisurely and lifted Ryu Hyerin’s amputated left arm. She lifted it to her face and placed her lips on the bleeding cross-section.

Ryu Hyerin now stared at the Paladin with an utterly terrified face. In turn, Kim Olim smiled back, baring her teeth. “Yeah. I wanted to see *_that_* expression on your face.”

Become a Patron!

TL: There are so much more revelations to come…but man, Olim is so metal. Her hands were severed for the sake of this plan.

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Ryu Hyerin clenched her teeth and tried to stem the blood flow by placing her hand on the bloody stump. After white light burst from her right hand, the bleeding stopped, but it was impossible for her to confront Kim Olim who was currently rushing back at her. Ryu Hyerin flapped her wings, continuously increasing her altitude. It appears she had given up on the battle and wanted to run away.

"[**Reception of the Gods**]" [1] Kim Olim, looking straight at her, raised [Rho-Aias] and used one of her own godly skills. [2]

Her long hair strands rose in the air, one by one; an alien and destructive energy built in her sparkling eyes.

[Rho-Aias]'s shape also changed. The circular shield glittered and became vaguely transparent, like a snowflake or ice crystal. Since the angel's blood was still splattered on its surface, the whole effect made the shield look similar to a brilliant ruby.

Meanwhile, Ryu Hyerin had flown almost high enough that her silhouette covered the moon. However, Kim Olim was not rushed; the Paladin slowly aimed her shield at the Priest.

And then…

Slice–!

“Ah….Aghhhh!”

[Rho-Aias] disappeared so quickly that I didn’t even see Kim Olim throw it. Soon, Ryu Hyerin, who had been floating midair, began to fall with a hair-raising scream.

Ryu Hyerin fell alongside shining feathers, which floated to the ground like snow. And soon, the terrible sound of flesh hitting the ground rang out.

“Ha, Haah…” In the aftermath of the fall, her body lay in a round crater. She looked so damaged that I was certain she would need immediate treatment.

There were puddles of blood underneath her wrongly bent limbs and convulsing body. The sandbank, which would normally suck blood in like a paper towel, could not contain the considerable amount of bloodshed.

However, even in such a dismal situation, Ryu Hyerin glared at Kim Olim with burning rage in her eyes. Even though certain death awaited the Priest, she did not beg for her life or cower in fear. Anger and hatred, rather than fear, seemed to flow through her.

Ryu Hyerin looked up at the motionless Kim Olim and grumbled first, “You… I… You… You think…Gasp! You won…Don’t you?”

“……”

“Just because…Just because of…this… Ha, Haah…”

“……”

“Did… You …Did you… T-Think…I’d beg…miserably…pathetically… to you…?” Hnnghrk…!”

Kim Olim stood silently in front of Ryu Hyerin before kneeling. She then carefully observed her wrecked body. Before anyone could react, Kim Olim lifted Ryu Hyerin's hair, which returned to its original black color, and brought the Priest's locks to her nose as if she were going to sniff them.

Ryu Hyerin winced at Kim Olim's actions. The Paladin closed her eyes and began to kiss Ryu Hyerin's long hair. Then, with an incomprehensibly calm voice, she said, "I knew you were jealous and hated me."

"……"

"Still, I couldn't bear the thought of hating you back."

"……"

"You were a childish, pitiable human being. However, I didn't hate that about you."

Ryu Hyerin opened her eyes wide; her lips fell open. However, the Priest said nothing–she was struck momentarily speechless.

Kim Olim soon opened her eyes and let the strands of hair fall from her fingers without an ounce of lingering regret; Ryu Hyerin stared blankly back. The Paladin stroked Ryu Hyerin's grisly face, as if she were trying to etch this last memory with her hands.

"What…What nonsense… You.. Me… You completely looked down on me!" Ryu Hyerin muttered to Kim Olim in a barely perceptible voice.

Kim Olim stared at Ryu Hyerin's distorted face and bloodshot eyes. Then, with a blank expression, she replied, "I was the one who threatened your parents so they wouldn't contact you anymore."

At that moment, the Priest's breath caught in her throat; her eyes searched the Paladin.

She appeared to have been swept away by a surging storm of confusion and distrust welling within her. However, Kim Olim did not care about her audience's reaction and began to smooth the Priest's hair back. "I was also

the one who persuaded Seo Dawon to at least listen to your heartfelt words at least once.”

“……”

“Why did I… wish for your happiness like that?”

Ryu Hyerin stopped for a few seconds before suddenly shaking her head like crazy–struggling as if she were going to stand up. She continued to deny what she had heard, convinced that she was hallucinating because of her severe injuries. “Nooo! Ha, haah… No, it can’t be… You..! You… You…!”

“……”

“D-Don’t… Don’t make me laugh… L…Lies…” Ryu Hyerin said through tears. Though, perhaps it was more accurate to say she howled through tears.

However, despite Ryu Hyerin’s screams, Kim Olim stood up back on her feet with an impassive expression. The Priest reached out to Kim Olim’s ankle reflexively, but her already broken limb would not listen properly.

As Ryu Hyerin writhed, she called out to the Paladin, “W-Wait… Wait…!”

“……”

Kim Olim retreated two steps away from Ryu Hyerin without answering. Then, after locking eyes, she adopted a cold smile. “What an unsightly face, Ryu Hyerin.”

“……!”

“Regret…You’re not worth it.”

“I…I…!” Ryu Hyerin raised her head and shot a startlingly pitiful look, but Kim Olim was no longer listening to her.

Ryu Hyerin opened and closed her mouth soundlessly–as if there were so many things she wanted to say…but she couldn't say a word because there was too much to say.

As Kim Olim mentioned, deep lingering emotions seemed to permeate the Priest's face. Perhaps she was feeling a belated realization–a feeling of being too late. Or perhaps she was feeling despair at a future she had broken with her own two hands.

However…

Without any further delay, Kim Olim slashed her sword diagonally; the sounds of bones being bisected rang into the air. Ryu Hyerin's panting breath disappeared, and the desert was soon filled with forlorn silence.

I watched from behind as Kim Olim's shadow–the silhouette of her lowered head–slowly disappeared. At the same time, the scent of Ryu Hyerin's blood, which had smelt sweet until a while ago, became disgusting. I stumbled–weak vertigo washed over me.

"Choi Lee-kyung."

"…Are you alright?" I asked.

But, before I could collapse, Kim Olim held onto me. I looked up at Kim Olim's expression–which had been wiped clean from the previous events–and touched her eyes almost automatically. Of course, the Paladin did not shed tears nor show agitation in her pupils…but she didn't avoid my touch either.

And today, unlike usual, she answered my question obediently. "I don't know. I feel a bit tired."

It's not like she went around with a blade held up, wary and vigilant… But, similar yet different to Seo Dawon, her energy had always felt a bit stern and rigid. Today, though, that aura seemed to be a little cracked.

I dragged her into my arms before I could fully process my own actions. My heart filled with melancholy for her, and I couldn’t help but want to give her a hug.

Kim Olim seemed to go rigid for a while, but soon pulled at my wrist with her immense strength and hid my face in her long, dangling hair. I hesitated before stroking the back of her head cautiously. Fortunately, she didn’t avoid my touch and stayed still, so I suffered no embarrassment.

After stroking her for a while, I spoke out loud the words that were rattling around in my brain, “B-By any chance…”

“……”

“I don’t want you to think that you’ve failed, or that your actions were futile, or for you to feel empty… O-Olim-ah.” [3]

I felt a little nervous because this was the first time I spoke to Kim Olim informally, but she looked into my face without laughing. Then, she lowered her eyes; an incomprehensible expression fluttered across her face.

I dodged her gaze and scratched at my faintly flushed cheeks. However, I opened my mouth again, rushing to speak the words in my heart, “The choices that people make… There’s really nothing we can do about that. No matter how much we want to pave a good road for those we care for…”

After saying that, I took a secret glance at her. Kim Olim gave a wry smile before replying, “If you’re talking about Ryu Hyerin, I don’t blame myself for her.”

“T-That’s right… You’re smart.”

“Because, I was the same. I made the wrong choices as well.” She spoke conclusively and cupped my face. Perhaps, as a consequence of being a Paladin Shieldbearer, her hands were so big; I was surprised at their size. Her hands together could hold my face entirely.

When I flinched and raised my head, Kim Olim looked at me with a sincere expression I had never seen on her face before. Though, distressingly, she kept fiddling with my cheeks way too much…

“I made the wrong choice to dedicate my love to the wrong person,” She said calmly.

“M-Mhmm…”

“It was strangely difficult to tear my eyes off her when she looked so pitiful.”

‘…If she says things like that while pinching and groping at my cheeks… It’s the same as saying I look pathetic as well.’

However, in the end, I didn’t express my dissatisfaction and merely inflated my cheeks with air, pouting like a hamster. Kim Olim gave a surprisingly stunning smile at my puffy cheeks.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: ???????? KIM OLIM YOUR ROMANTIC TASTES ARE?????? Also thanks for not forgetting the B and L in LGBTQA+, Necromancer Survival.

Also this makes Ryu Hyerin’s flashback so tragic for our poor Paladin Unni.

Footnotes

1. is a step in the Korean ancestry rites during our “day of the dead.” At this step, we invite our ancestors to possess a receptacle so we may feed them/pray to them/honor them etc
2. Godly, in this scenario, does not literally mean holy. The original used a slang term where God-like means “top level” or impressive.
3. AHHHHHH HE DROPPED FORMALITIES

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Chapter 298

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I stared at Kim Olim, amazed. But soon, a cold voice came from behind me and pierced through our warm embrace. “Why don’t you stop clinging to him, hm?”

It was Seo Dawon.

In one natural movement, he hugged me from behind and pulled me out of the Paladin’s arms.

She let me go, but also added pitifully, “Jealousy… You’re such an eyesore, Seo Dawon.” [1]

“You’re not the only one who can’t stand still when you see someone so helpless.”

“What?” For some reason, I felt like those words were very pointed… and pointed at me. When I looked back, I could see that Seo Dawon stared back with a troubled expression. Just as I had expected–those words truly were an accusation directed at me.

The Mage didn’t stop there. He spoke in a frustrated tone, as if he were confronting a cheating lover, “Lee-kyung-ah, are you always going to be this easy?” [2]

“W-What are you saying! I’m just…”

But, before I could make my excuses, Kim Olim bluntly cut through. The atmosphere began to change into something strange. “Are you trying to monopolize Choi Lee-kyung’s hugs? How ridiculous.”

“Of course–Lee-kyung-ie is mine.”

“I won’t believe in something that occurred while you steadily brainwashed Choi Lee-kyung when he was in a feeble state of mind and body.”

“How horrible of you to describe my efforts to take care of Lee-kyung-ie when he was sick while simultaneously letting him know my feelings like that, Olim-ah.”

This absurd verbal war between those two only stopped after the Golem hidden underneath the sand slowly rose and appeared.

The half-revealed [Sand Golem]’s head was tilted back; Choi Kyung-sik jumped out of the Golem’s control seat. Next to him, Jung Garam followed, rubbing his eyes with an exhausted expression.

“It’s in better condition than I expected!” As soon as Choi Kyung-sik quickly dismounted, he immediately ran and began to examine Ryu Hyerin’s body.

I flinched slightly when I saw the Priest, who I had forgotten during the Paladin and Mage’s childish bickering. In fact, this was the first time I saw the aftermath–the corpse–properly, so I felt a bit perturbed when I saw the miserable state of her body. The rigor-mortis-hardened, pale arms especially disrupted my calm.

However, Choi Kyung-sik continued to scavenge the body with an excited face. Ryu Hyerin’s upper body was raised up. Fortunately, though, the Priest had her eyes closed as if she were asleep; if I didn’t look any lower than her neck, the body felt a little less disgusting. Besides, Choi Kyung-sik had covered Ryu Hyerin’s torso, so the wounds were hidden.

Garam-ie quietly stood between me and the Alchemist before walking my way. He looked a little tired, but he soon buried his face in my chest and wrapped his arms around me.

The Mage and the Paladin, standing at my sides, almost simultaneously glared at Garam-ie. However, Garam-ie did not budge and languidly called out my name. “Choi Lee~ Kyung~…. It was so difficult to maintain that barrier.”

“Y-You did well…”

“You know how hard I tried, right?”

“Huh? Uh… Of course.”

“Then, you’ll let me sleep next to you tonight? Hm?”

I almost nodded at his words because I could clearly see the dark circles underneath Garam-ie’s eyes.

In fact, as we plotted to lure Ryu Hyerin to this location, we even had in mind a scenario in which she would flee battle, injured. We also had to think about the possibility of her calling Bae Jaemin or the other traitors over the phone.

That’s why, in case Ryu Hyerin chose to run away, we picked a desert terrain covered with sand for our battle. The overall area was quite far from the Hub’s downtown and was occupied by undeveloped areas that had not yet been built. This desert was the least visited and most remote location in this district.

As a place to lure and attack someone, this desert was the best; there were no convenient facilities nearby, and the radio connection here was spotty. The [Sand Golem] was the first thing we made from the golem ingredients we had bought last time.

The golem’s attack power was poor, but it was a great unit to explore and search in special terrains like the desert. And, above all, the price was

so low that Choi Kyung-sik could be on standby, waiting within piles of sand and perched on the [Sand Golem].

Likewise, Garam's role was incredibly important as well: the young Assassin implemented an extensive [Maze] that made Ryu Hyerin lose her sense of direction.

Actually, if I were to summon Jung Garam, this skill wouldn't require so much effort. However, I had to summon Kim Olim, so Garam-ie had to tightly maintain his [Maze] on this vast terrain while constantly guzzling Choi Kyung-sik's potions.

Thanks to this, we were able to continue our battle with Ryu Hyerin without encountering any vehicles or visitors that might pass through this region. In other words, this operation could have failed without Garam.

"No."

"No."

Nevertheless, Seo Dawon and Kim Olim turned down Garam's request (?) quite fiercely.

Honestly, his request was directed at me! Why did they refuse for me? But, I felt that…their expressions looked so determined that I couldn't even say a peep.

"Mm? Lee~ Kyung~ Ah~…" Of course, Jung Garam, ignoring the two's blazing, formidable glares, clung to me.

"You gay bastards. Let's go home. Home." This tense atmosphere was resolved thanks to Woo Ragi, who walked a bit crookedly with an echo blade perched on his shoulder. He was lucky his interruption helped, otherwise he would have been in trouble again. Taking advantage of the Swordsman's sudden appearance, Seo Dawon picked up Jung Garam, and the Assassin was eventually forced to unlatch himself from my side.

“W-What are you doing! Put me down! I’m going to hug Lee-kyung-ie!” Jung Garam shouted.

“You used to say that Hyung was the only one for you.”

“When did I ever say that?!”

Seo Dawon pretended to be sorrowful while keeping Jung Garam in his arms, and Garam-ie shouted that he was going to break his Hyung’s fingers. However, the Assassin was eventually calmed by the Mage’s embrace.

Woo Ragi had waited the furthest away from all of us; he was stationed at the edge of the [Maze] just in case Ryu Hyerin succeeded in getting out. Though it didn’t seem like much happened on his end, his complexion didn’t look too good.

I recalled the penalty that would intensify when the distance between [Master] and [Servant] increases–something I had learned just before this operation. However, judging by the gradual relaxing of his furrowed brows, the limitations must ease once we entered each other’s line of sight.

‘Still, I’m glad he didn’t ask me to hug him…’

After a sly glance at Woo Ragi, I checked on Choi Kyung-sik, who was busying himself by loading and transporting Ryu Hyerin(?) from one place to another. Once I confirmed the status of all servants, I held Lackey in my arms. I knew that the skeleton could walk normally now that it had recovered its body, but, when my brain recalled the sight of its broken bones, my heart hurt. My hands automatically reached out to the skeleton.

[Clack Clack!]

[Please hug me!]

Lackey must not have minded my concern either, since the skeleton clung to my neck.

Choi Kyung-sik quickly started to overturn the place where Ryu Hyerin’s body used to lie using the [Sand Golem]. It was quite strange to

see blood-soaked sand being sucked into a black pit.

Time passed quickly as we began to carefully erase each trace of battle. Before we knew it, the rising sunlight began to pierce my pupils. I looked around and said to my servants, “Well… we should return.”

Kim Olim showed up with a four-wheel-drive car that could run on sand.

We boarded the car and drove down a less-traveled, long road. After traveling for some time, I relaxed; I began to doze off and hit my head on the window.

Seo Dawon immediately leaned my head towards him. “Lee-kyung-ah.”

I could hear Seo Dawon softly whispering to me, but my awareness was gradually submerging into the deep waters of unconsciousness, and I couldn’t remember what else he said.

* * *

When I opened my eyes again, I was in a bedroom illuminated by the bright rays of the midday sun. And… Garam-ie lay beside me with his eyes closed. “Jung Garam…?”

Garam-ie woke up at my call.

When I looked closer at his red eyes that had become slightly transparent in the sunlight, the Assassin’s figure gave me a bit of a hazy feeling. On one hand, Garam-ie seemed to have been asleep for a long while; on the other, he looked as if he didn’t sleep one wink.

Worried about the young Assassin’s unusual disposition, I touched his forehead unwittingly. Of course, as my hands reached his skin, I wondered to myself what on earth I was doing.

Jung Garam chuckled, “Pfft…What is that…Are you trying to see if I have a fever?”

“N-No… But, you… You seem to have little energy.”

“It’s because I’m hungry.” Garam-ie said, sending me a sly glance.

I hesitated for a moment before lowering my voice and asking him, “Do you perhaps…need my blood?”

In lieu of answering, the Assassin blinked his eyes. He looked hesitant.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Uh wow, Kim Olim is taking my heart ya’ll. I’m gonna need resuscitation.

Also O.O
Is…Lee-kyung offering his blood? Seo Dawon isn’t going to like this.

Footnotes

1. (gaji-gaji) slang for someone so detestable you don’t want to see them!
2. He’s saying that Lee-kyung accepts everyone. Aka romantically easy or sexually easy lmao.

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Chapter 299

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“If I say I want to drink it… will you give your blood to me?” After staring at me silently for a long time, Garam hesitantly asked.

Garam seemed a bit sorry, though, at the same time, his eyes were filled with inevitable expectations. I could tell he had been more conflicted about his bloodthirst than I had imagined. No matter how much Seo Dawon or Kim Olim tried to stop him, at this rate…

“By the way, back when I was hospitalized…Did you ever bite me?” So, I decided to ask a question that had been on my mind.

Garam made a strange expression. After smacking his chapped lips together a few times, he sighed deeply and replied, “Yeah.”

“Had you ever done so before?”

“No? But… I’m especially hungry nowadays. It’s so hard…”

In other words, if the Assassin gets a chance in the future, I may be bitten again.

I couldn’t tell if he was being so brazen because the Assassin was normally so honest or because he had no countermeasures, but anyway, Garam looked like a young child being scolded by his older brother. A strange sympathy arose as I watched both guilt and hunger coexist on his youthful face.

I pondered for a bit before nodding. Though, I would like to add that my decision wasn't wholly colored by emotion.

In fact, I had always thought the Servant's desire for blood was part of the Necromancer's class, so I kept trying to brainstorm how to use that desire for the benefit of both me and my Servant. Though, I had never brainstormed out loud.

Garam looked at me, still and obedient; there was an air of disbelief hanging around the Assassin. "……Really?"

However, when I nodded once more, Garam quickly approached and gripped me. The force of his grip holding my shoulder was very powerful. He then gazed at the back of my neck; I could almost imagine the saliva dripping from his lips.

When I got exasperated by that gaze, I covered that vulnerable patch of skin and blocked my neck from Garam's view. The young Assassin frowned immediately and asked in a slightly tearful voice, "What the… Was that a joke?"

"No. I-I'm not trying to give you my blood in a traditional way though."

Garam-ie tilted his head, "Then, how would you like me to drink?"

"Maybe with a syringe… Something like handing you a blood-donation bag."

"……" Garam looked up, as if he were contemplating, but then also seemed to agree that my method was better. In the blink of an eye, he took off both hands that were gripping my shoulder, letting me go. "That's better for you, right?"

"Honestly, I don't mind either method… But I don't want my neck to break while you bite me–just in case."

That was one of my reasons.

Goosebumps rising up my arms, I shivered a bit, but, staring at Garam-ie's sharp canines, I tried to relax my instinctively reluctant mind.

I rose from my seat first; I wanted to get various tools like syringes. Though, the person that probably has those types of things was…

Click–

However, the door opened and cut off my line of thought. Seo Dawon, who had brought us some cups filled with water, looked at us. I was startled and worried that the Mage had overheard our conversation, but, judging from the Mage's expression, that didn't seem to be the case. He merely frowned at Garam, as if he belatedly noted the young Assassin's presence.

'Ah…! That's right, Seo Dawon said that skills were placed on this room.'

Though I was surprised that the Mage had nothing to say about my scheme, I soon recalled that soundproofing skills were cast on this room.

Though the Mage cast them for his own insidious (?) purposes, the skills were actually quite beneficial to me this time. Although, I had thought of informing Seo Dawon after I had properly drawn up and implemented my plan. I'm just a naturally anxious person…

Unaware of my trickery, Seo Dawon approached Garam, "When did you get in?"

Garam rolled his eyes for a moment, looked at me, and soon smiled. "Mm, when you were cooking?"

"He didn't do anything, did he?" Seo Dawon's following question was directed at me. I shook my head quietly.

Seo Dawon gave suspicious looks to both the young Assassin and I, but soon released his hold on Garam-ie as he did not find anything strange. Garam-ie winked at me before closing the door and leaving.

Click–

When the door closed, the Mage handed me a cup of water. Flustered by the suddenness of this situation, I sat back down on the bed. When I stared up, his face seemed displeased.

“What were you talking about with Garam-ie?” he asked.

“…Well, we didn’t talk about much? He was just next to me when I opened my eyes.”

However, Seo Dawon didn’t fall for my words. He squinted his eyes and looked down at me while I drank my water. He muttered in a soft voice, “Do you know you make a cute face when you lie?”

“C-Cough…”

The Mage kneeled before me when the water went down the wrong pipe in my throat. He pulled out a few tissues from the box on the table and handed them to me.

Even if I took a gamble at another excuse, my reactions made it clear that something fishy was going on. But, instead of obediently confessing, I protested to the Mage while snatching the tissues away. Face burning, I said, “D-Don’t say such weird things!”

“I just said what I noticed. Why?”

“……”

“It’s not like I’m interrogating you.” Seo Dawon answered before looking at me calmly. He noticed that I was scheming something with Garam-ie, but it didn’t seem like he was intending to restrict us. However…

He sighed briefly before sitting next to me, “You’re getting revenge, aren’t you? Choi Lee-kyung.”

“Revenge for what?”

“The way I… did things as I pleased without telling you. In the past.”

“……”

Though I wasn’t really getting revenge, Seo Dawon stared at me nervously, his expression half frustrated and half concerned. Honestly… I liked that expression.

Looking into his eyes, I remembered the Mage’s face when he reunited with Ryu Hyerin at dawn–the cold scorn in his murderous glare. He has no idea how much I restrained myself from checking his [current mood] behind his back.

Slowly dragging myself out of my thoughts, I chuckled a little and held the Mage’s hand tightly. “It’s nothing like that… It’s just that I don’t intend to share everything inside my head with you, Dawon-ah.”

“……”

“It’s not that I’m trying to push you away… You know your concern over me can get a little obsessive.” I spoke gently, careful not to sound too cold.

Then, Seo Dawon lightly stroked my cheeks with a pouty smile, “So, I guess that means you’re scheming something worth my obsessive concern.”

“……” I was a little flustered by his response. In light of Seo Dawon’s doubts, I decided to admit my plans rather than be inevitably caught later. So I sighed and told him, “I just thought… I’d draw some blood.

As soon as I spoke, Seo Dawon's brows furrowed. He said in a cold voice, "Don't."

"…I'm not giving it to you all just because you want it. However, if you have this blood, maybe the distance penalty can be slightly alleviated. I wanted to consider its utilizations…"

"Don't do it. Are you making yourself into experimental supplies?" Seo Dawon held fiercely onto my arms with a stubborn look on his face. Then, he stared at my unresponsive self.

"You're acting strange these days." He muttered, frustrated. Still, I didn't answer. I had only re-confirmed that the Mage was still too morbidly sensitive about my safety.

A person wouldn't die if they drew some blood. And, if my hunch was correct, I could mitigate the penalty with only a small amount of blood. Naturally, I should take advantage of this.

It's not like I was going to cut my wrist, and I would only draw blood in a hygienic manner if the blood loss wouldn't cause any health problems. However, my words weren't making it through to the Mage's brain.

Rather, the Mage's expression grew stiffer, as if anger was rising within him. He began to question me, "Why are you overdoing things?"

"…How is this overdoing things?"

"You don't take care of your own health and keep running yourself ragged. I'm sure your personality wasn't originally so self-sacrificing."

I knew he didn't intend such an implication, but, to my ears, it felt like he was criticizing me for being hypocritical. 'Why are you doing things you haven't done before.' After all, this was Seo Dawon. Though the creation of our original contract may be an old memory by now, I had actually tried to refuse, at first, to sign a contract with the Mage out of fear.

I knew Seo Dawon wasn't trying to bring up that matter. However, the surging shame within me wouldn't vanish either. I twisted my hand out of the Mage's grasp. "That's right. I don't like to do such dangerous things, and my life is still the most important thing to me. That's true for the past and now."

"Lee-kyung-ah." Seo Dawon called out my name as if to try and appease me. He must have thought he hit a nerve. After gazing past him for a while, I swallowed what I wanted to say.

'However, now I want to revive you at all costs, as fast as possible.'

Therefore, I was prepared to be a little injured…To some extent, at least–I wouldn't want to lose my life.

Of course, I couldn't really confess those words to Seo Dawon when his expression looked so perilous yet concerned. So, tamping down those thoughts, I coldly replied, "So, you don't need to worry about it. I'll take care of it on my own."

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Dang, Garam's really just out there saying "Yeah I want your blood. And lol yup I bit you."

Also, Lee-kyung-ie’s being more independent, for better or for worse.

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Chapter 300

Chapter 300

I didn’t want to be hated. However, recently, I was gripped by anxiety over the current trajectory of our relationship; I was certain things shouldn’t continue as they had been. Even though, through the corners of my eyes, I could see Seo Dawon’s contorted expression–even though he felt alienated because I was pushing him away… In the end, I couldn’t apologize.

Seo Dawon stood up quietly from his seat; his fingers brushed against my face as if he were stroking it. Despite his cold expression, his fingertips were affectionate. “I understand. I understand, so…don’t look so tearful, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“……”

“How could I ever defy you…”

My breath caught in my throat–his words didn’t sound like sarcastic grumblings. Rather, the Mage seemed to be muttering to himself, ignorant of the fact that he had said that out loud.

Seo Dawon calmly stared down at me before turning his back to leave the room. Until the door closed, my hand that held the glass of water felt so heavy.

With a melancholic heart, I lowered my head. As soon as I did so, I noticed a new system message notification blinking just below my normal range of vision.

I hadn’t opened it yet, but that message was probably going to notify me of my growth and level-ups that occurred after Ryu Hyerin’s death. I

recalled that I had pushed the window to the corner of my view as I dozed off on the way home after the operation.

However, strangely, I had no desire to check the message anytime soon. I raised my hand to touch the floating notification, but in the end, I couldn't do anything and lowered my finger helplessly.

'…This all started when I wanted to level up so badly, I even paid Kim Sang-yoon to help me…'

My past of running around so hard for level-ups felt so far away. Now, I had no deep desire to grow; anxiety and uncanny fear rushed deep into my heart rather than hopeful expectations.

To be frank, at some point I became afraid of level-ups rather than looking forward to them. That was because when I grew significantly, I had to summon a new guild member. And, when I entered and exited these [Vengeful Ghost Memories], I felt like I was losing humanity…my ego…

I kept feeling the guild members' intense emotions–their resentment–as if they were my own. That wouldn't be so bad by itself, but when their emotions rushed into me, it felt like my own emotions were pushed away to be destroyed somewhere… Like my judgements, my will, and my thoughts were serving my Servants rather than myself. So, I was often confused as to whether my thoughts or my desires were truly my own.

'However, I can't…say anything about this to the Servants.' I released a depressed sigh. "Haah…"

I looked at the blinking status window once more. It felt as if I were glancing at some homework I had procrastinated; my body felt leaden.

The notification made me feel uncomfortable, and I didn't want to touch it. Even without checking the status window, I could already predict that this most recent showdown with Ryu Hyerin resulted in extraordinary rewards. In other words, I should have gained the ability to summon another guild member. In addition, my friendship levels with Kim Olim, the

one to actually defeat Ryu Hyerin, had increased significantly as well. My friendship levels with my Servants also greatly affected my stats.

‘I’m sure it’ll be better than before.’

That’s what I told myself…However, I couldn’t stop the flow of cold sweat running down my back.

‘I should summon them quickly and improve my class skills…’

Bae Jaemin was sure to be more aggressive than before since Ryu Hyerin had disappeared on him.

Actually, I’ve been pretty lucky until now. My enemies were careless because my class was so unrecognized. My actions went unnoticed as well when I dealt with them, one by one.

‘However, it’ll be different from now on.’

Our enemies will probably move in at least groups of two; things we don’t anticipate may occur during our operations. If I’m unlucky, Bae Jaemin will realize everything that had happened and may try to kill me straight away.

‘…And, if that were to really happen…’

I would have no way to avoid death except by using my hidden abilities– I would offer my vitality in exchange for summoning all the Servants simultaneously.

So, before then, I had planned to sign the contract with all the [Red Lotus] members as soon as possible and increase our friendship levels intensively. Drawing blood and utilizing it was all part of that plan. I wanted to experiment with taming the Servants. What would happen if I fed them my blood, especially with their varying levels of wariness and vigilance against me (Woo Ragi, Choi Kyung-sik, and Jung Garam in the order of most to least wariness)?

Actually, Jung Garam was open-minded and friendly enough that I felt sorry to lump the young Assassin in with the other two, but due to Garam-ie's independent and free-spirited character, he seemed resistant to the idea of our dependent 'Servant-Master' relationship. Garam-ie enjoyed it when I stroked his head, but there was a wild possibility that the very same hand may be bitten at any time. Undoubtedly, Kim Olim and Seo Dawon were concerned over that aspect of Garam-ie's character and wanted to pay close attention.

Only now have I begun to dimly understand these complex interworkings. And as I leveled up, this understanding–rather, insight–only deepens.

That is to say, back then I considered the Servants as completely separate entities; nowadays, the Servants felt like an unruly extension of my own body.

The other day, Seo Dawon had told me he was wary of opening his heart to me because he feared that a Servant would lose his own ego if he became subordinate to the Master. However, upon closer examination, it's not just a unilateral disadvantage for the Servant…

'I've also been constantly drawn towards the Servants…'

It's a two-way phenomenon.

'Well, come to think of it, I was also quite taken with Lackey when I first summoned it.'

Actually, I only ever had a Maltese as a pet before I met Lackey. And Lackey was a special being that was wholly different from a regular animal. No matter how small and cute the skeleton may be, it still looked like an undead creature.

However, I've always felt great affection for Lackey from the very beginning. I hardly felt any repulsion from its appearance. And, as my levels grew, that pattern repeated itself with my other Servants.

No matter how much Woo Ragi picks fights with me, that doesn’t bother me all that much anymore.

It was the same for Choi Kyung-sik. His mysterious, ambiguous smile made me wonder what he was thinking rather than immediately feeling social discomfort.

When Garam-ie whined and clung to me, I wanted to embrace him at his level.

When Kim Olim stood behind me, I felt comfortable. I was certain the mere sight of the Paladin made me uncomfortable at first.

‘And, Seo Dawon…’

With Seo Dawon, I wanted to do anything for him. Whatever he wanted…

“What strange emotions.” I knew that my heart leaned towards them even as I whispered to myself. I also knew that the Mage never wanted me to think this way–to be influenced by his presence in this manner. Furthermore, his deepest wishes couldn’t be resolved single-handedly with my lacking ability.

More and more frequently, my rational thought processes were becoming paralyzed. Especially when Seo Dawon looked at me…When he called my name, looking down at me with those crimson eyes…

‘Who knows what would happen if my level rises even higher?’

Will Servants and Master eventually amalgamate into one codependent lump? Will I think of them as siblings? Family? Or as part of my body? Will I become obsessed?

‘Right now, I still find the warping of my thoughts strange, but, if I succeed in summoning another member and continue to boost my Necromancer abilities…’

I felt as if I had fallen into a swamp. Could I continue like this? Anxiety washed over me.

Did Seo Dawon feel the same way in the beginning? Did he also feel like he had to walk straight into a clearly visible trap? However, Seo Dawon eventually opened up to me. Then, and only then, did I finally fully grasp his conflict.

I returned from my contemplations, smiled bitterly, and pressed the system message notification that had been blinking for a long while.

‘Anyways, now I…’

There was nothing I could do. The only road to survival was to kill the enemy.

And, in front of my eyes, a flamboyant congratulatory message flashed before me–almost as if the system was congratulating me for my realization.

[Your level has risen significantly after soothing a Servant’s grudge.]

[A new class skill has been unlocked.]

[For succeeding at a revenge far beyond one’s ability, the Necromancer’s abilities have greatly increased.]

[**Name:** Choi Lee Kyung – **Lv 225**
Class: Intermediate Necromancer

HP-771,200
MP-101,000

Title:

Sweeter than Candy – Revenge truly is sweet.
< The title, ‘Sweeter than Candy’ can only be obtained by users who, in the pursuit of revenge, inflict irreparable damage on their target without suffering retaliation or damage in return. While using this title, the title’s

special skill, ‘Counter Attack’ may activate– doubling the damage from an enemy’s physical or magic attack and returning it back at the opponent.>

Those Who Cross the Line – Not all are fortunate enough to come back from the brink of death.
<The title ‘Those Who Cross the Line’ increases luck by +10% while the title is being used. There is a 0.1% chance you can avoid instant death.>

Greenhorn Adventurer – You’ve tasted the bitterness of life!
<While using the title ‘Greenhorn Adventurer’, movement speed will increase by 5%>

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):

Magic: 888
Magic control: 10.4%
Movement Speed: 29.7% (+7.23%)

>Skill

– Summon Evil Spirits

[Summon Vengeful Ghosts: Proficiency 100%, Rank: Highest Rank]
[Summon Sacrificial Offering: Proficiency 0.7%, Rank: Lowest Rank]

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-Possession

When certain conditions are met, the Servant can use the Summoner’s body.

– Death Mark

After special conditions are met, you can attach a death mark to the enemy. A living enemy marked by death will suffer a significant loss in defense; furthermore, you can gain additional experience from the marked enemy.

– Shinigami's Book

You can summon a soul within one hour after their death and look into the soul's memories.

– Seal Spirit

You can seal a soul into a weapon in order to enchant it.

– Eternal Night (Field Type) <new!>

The Necromancer can create the best possible environment for themselves within a set range. Up to 12 hours. The field increases all the Servant's skill attack power by 20%.]

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: You know, I thought the author had completely forgotten about the previous Necromancer Class skill gained…but it's right there: "seal spirit"

That sounds…really OP and evil. I'm sure the sealing process isn't pleasant.

Also, damn, that's some deep introspection Lee-kyung-ah. You're really thinking things through… You're really the Necromancer pioneer.

ALSO CHAPTER 300! Woot! I can't belive we've gone this far!!

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Chapter 301

Chapter 301

I called Choi Kyung-sik to my bedroom. Due to the skills Seo Dawon had cast onto this space, I realized I could talk comfortably here.

“You want to do an experiment, and you’ll need a syringe?” Choi Kyung-sik stared at me with a strange expression. He then crossed his arms, as if he had seen through me, before I could even respond, “Are you thinking of drawing your own blood?”

“…Yes. But not too much…”

“Haah…” Choi Kyung-sik sighed blatantly before looking me up and down. Then, with an exhausted expression, he nagged at me like a doctor, “Lee-kyung-ssi, do you perhaps even know how much you weigh?”

“Yes?”

“You’re down 10 kilograms from your normal weight. And, considering your recent hospitalizations for the past three months… No–Let’s disregard that. It seems that you don’t really grasp your own body’s condition right now.” With that said, Choi Kyung-sik grabbed my wrist. Even though he was slender like me and didn’t appear to be a physically fit person, his grip was like a jail. To be frank, this was humiliating.

Shaking off his hand, I tried to protest, “That’s…!”

However, ignoring my struggles, Choi Kyung-sik continued, “By the way, about the potion you drink every day… Do you know how much it

costs to manufacture that potion? If Guildmaster-nim hadn't given me a mana stone he had salvaged after dismantling one of his personal items, I wouldn't be able to think about crafting that potion."

"What did you say?"

"One of the potion's effects involves regenerating your blood quickly. You spent so much money on replenishing your body's blood and now you want to pull it out? Why would you be so inefficient?"

Startled, I looked at Choi Kyung-sik. However, he merely pushed his glasses up, exasperated, before staring at me blatantly. Then, caring little whether or not I heard, he clicked his tongue. With that loathsome perceptiveness, the young Alchemist must have known what reaction I had hoped for. And so…

"Our potion materials have been sufficiently stocked since we raided Geum Miyoung's safe house. That is to say, we no longer have to destroy innocent items anymore. Are you satisfied?" Choi Kyung-sik glanced at me momentarily while speaking. His expression, in that short moment, looked incredibly angry. That was the most intense and emotional expression I had ever seen on his face.

Of course, when our eyes met, that intensity disappeared in an instant. But, there was a lingering coldness on his face.

Choi Kyung-sik's smile seemed strained–as if he had barely managed to draw the corners of his lips upwards. The words that tumbled from his lips were colder than ever. "Therefore, Choi Lee-kyung-ssi… You shouldn't think, 'I'm sorry I made you destroy your items.' Rather, you should think of preserving your own body first."

"No, I meant…"

"No. You still don't understand what I'm saying. Choi Lee-kyung-ssi, you… You almost died last time. Back when you were trapped by Koo Hui-seo."

"……"

"That's why Guildmaster-nim smashed that item in a hurry, had the potion made, and fed it to you. But, what's this? Now you want to draw your own blood? This isn't stubbornness–you're being obstinate."

As I listened to the Alchemist's words, it occurred to me that I no longer saw the small ring that Seo Dawon wore on his pinky finger.

After seeing my darkened expression, Choi Kyung-sik opened and closed his lips as if he had more to say before turning his head, holding his remarks inside. He stared at the wall for a long while before speaking in a subdued tone, "Why are you so impatient? What we want from Choi Lee-kyung-ssi… Is for him to stay safe. Just that. You know that well, right? We don't want you to die a dog's death." [1]

I felt a little overwhelmed listening to him.

Choi Kyung-sik was probably the most emotionally distant servant from me–not that he cared about that. Rather, he was always willing to observe me quite objectively. Just like a scientist.

Despite that indifference, his words, just now, were full of sincerity. I felt pure anxiety and sadness exuding from the Alchemist, and my heart felt uncomfortably guilty. Pressing my beating heart with one hand, I answered slowly, "About that…. Being safe and all… Now that Ryu Hyerin is gone, my safety is no longer guaranteed. They're probably already suspecting us. Now, the war hangs on speed."

Choi Kyung-sik hesitated before looking at me.

To some extent, he must have also realized that we could not continue our operations in this manner. None of the servants had voiced this opinion, but the atmosphere inside the home felt like the calm before the storm.

Choi Kyung-sik did not confirm nor deny my words; however, I could now perceive that he shared my worries.

Despite his silence, I continued to voice my opinions. “I’m not planning to draw a lot of blood–about a pack at most. And, I won’t draw blood often, either.”

“…….”

“I think, in a way, this blood can become a safety device. To confirm my hypothesis, though… I’ll have to conduct some experiments.”

“So, is that why you called for me?”

“Yes. Choi Kyung-sik is the most… Mm. Well, you seem the most rationally cold-hearted.”

Choi Kyung-sik raised his eyebrows, as if he were displeased, but he didn’t deny it. After all, he was the Servant that maintained a professional distance with me.

Woo Ragi was too self-righteous, and I couldn’t predict Garam’s behavior. Seo Dawon and Kim Olim seem to have stabilized, so I’m not sure their reactions to my blood experiments would be significant enough to generate data.

Choi Kyung-sik released a deep sigh, as if he finally understood me. Then, in a broken voice, he said, “I might become too excited by the blood and hurt you.” [2]

“About that. Seo Dawon has already attached protective skills to my body; it’ll probably be a bit difficult for you if you try to attack me,” I answered calmly.

Those words seem to have persuaded the Alchemist; Choi Kyung-sik grumbled, “I don’t think Guildmaster-nim had this in mind when he cast those spells.”

“Of course. However, you can leave soothing Seo Dawon to me–you won’t get into trouble over this. All Kyung-sik-ssi needs to do is answer whether or not he’ll participate.”

"……"

"For what it's worth, if you refuse, my experiments will not end here. I'll go to Woo Ragi or Jung Garam instead. They may have more violent reactions compared to Choi Kyung-sik-ssi; I wonder which one is a safer option…"

"Haah… Alright. Damn it." Choi Kyung-sik ran his hand through his hair, disheveling his locks, and inserted his hand into something midair–his inventory perhaps.

When he brought his hand out, there was a square box in his grasp. Without relaxing his uncomfortable expression, he raised his other hand, which had been continuously holding onto my wrist.

"What is that?" I asked.

"I'll be collecting some blood for now. This model doesn't hurt, so please relax your hand."

I blushed a bit when he reminded me not to exaggerate my pain, but since Choi Kyung-sik guaranteed its effectiveness to pain ratio, I placed my finger in the collector. When the Alchemist pressed the button on its side, blood soon leaked out despite the fact that I felt nothing.

Choi Kyung-sik collected a few drops of my blood and placed them in the specially crafted alchemy box. And, when he wiped my finger with something that appeared to be gauze, the wound quickly healed. This was all so painless that I didn't feel as if my finger had been pricked.

"Is that it?" I asked.

"…Haah. Yes." Choi Kyung-sik exhaled as if he had been holding his breath for a long while. Perhaps I was the only one that felt the ordeal was painless.

As I looked down at him, I asked, "Choi Kyung-sik-ssi, are you also very sensitive to the smell of blood?"

“Yes.”

“How unexpected. You’ve never shown such tendencies before.”

Choi Kyung-sik raised his head at those words. I watched his red eyes twinkle for a short while.

The young Alchemist, wrangling his impulses with his cold rationality, spoke slowly, “In my case, the desire for your blood presents itself as something similar to dire thirst. It feels like I haven’t drunk anything for around three days.”

“……”

“Actually, even though I know it’s futile, I’ve been drinking tea to try and compensate. It felt terrible–like I was swallowing sand.”

As I listened to him, I remembered that Seo Dawon had once spat out food immediately after taking a bite.

Choi Kyung-sik continued to mutter in a tearful, gloomy voice, “Then, when Choi Lee-kyung-ssi approaches…”

“……”

“It feels like someone is wiping my lips with a wet towel. It feels as if I can breathe a little.”

We stood there, staring at each other. I asked, “Then, why do you always sit so far away?”

“Is there any reason to ask when the answer is so obvious, Lee-kyung-ssi? You already know everything. You must know that, as our contract continues on, there’re more effects that may occur as we open our hearts to you.”

“……”

“I desire to remain a human being, even if I thirst for blood. I don’t want to live as a servant, continuously coveting you.”

“…Dawon-ie and Olim-ie are maintaining their balance. Even if we become close…”

“Those two have strong egos. They have faith in their abilities.” Choi Kyung-sik revealed, for the very first time, his own vulnerabilities. He turned his head, avoiding my gaze, “I’m a normal person in both will and ego…unlike those two.”

___

Become a Patron!

TL: Pre-emptively sorry for the long TL note below:

Let’s talk about Korean and English. Rather, let’s talk about how English doesn’t have many forms of address that carry meaning. When “you” is spoken, usually the tone of the word is determined by the tone of the speaker. ‘You’ can be angry, loving, etc…but that doesn’t come off in writing inherently. Thus, English novels need a signifier or adjective to show what kind of “you” is being used.

Korean is different. I’ve said before that Koreans don’t really use pronouns. We often use names when talking to or about others. However, when

pronouns are used, they carry connotations. The neutral ‘ (nuh)’ is informal but devoid of emotional connotation unless there is a tonal signifier. This is our equivalent of the English ‘You.’ However, Koreans have other ways to say ‘you.’ ‘ (dang-shin)’ is one of them. (Which is how Choi Kyung-sik refers to Choi Lee-kyung in their argument above).

is a complicated term–it’s not used often. As a pronoun, it paradoxically is both intimate and distant. For example, when someone you don’t know says ‘ ’ to you, it can be that the person is drawing a line in the sand–creating distance. is also used between *married* couples to give the connotation of ‘honey’ or ‘dear’ to the addressee. However, this is complicated further by the fact that is also used to show displeasure. Within married couples, while can be a sign of intimacy, it can also be used by the wife or husband to show that they’re upset with each other… Especially when isn’t used often in their relationship.

It’s funny–I often see Google Translate use when they translate the English ‘you’ into Korean. Because that’s quite formal. However, that’s when I know that a Korean comment on Youtube or something is google translated–Very few people online use ‘ .’

Footnotes

1. I think I’ve explained this before, but a ‘dog’s death’ refers to a death that is too pitiful for any human.
2. I’ll explain the specific ‘you’ Choi Kyung-sik uses in the footnotes below.

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Chapter 302

Chapter 302

How surprising.

To be honest, I had always thought that Choi Kyung-sik didn't trust me. As a result, I always felt awkward around him since I wanted to respect his choice to not become closer.

Who knows, though; perhaps my perspective was colored by my inferiority complex. Now a bit more relaxed, I said, "I thought… I thought you considered me stupid."

"I see you're not completely oblivious."

A straightforward, blunt reply–yet his tone held no heat. I no longer felt thorns hidden in his words. So, slowly, I began to approach him.

"What…" Choi Kyung-sik tried to step backwards instinctively, but he couldn't resist once I grabbed his arm.

At that moment, I reached out to Choi Kyung-sik's face. Then I covered his lips with my palm. This was the first time I had seen him so flustered.

Even for me, the way I had acted took quite a bit of courage. My heart beat like crazy. But, as I conversed with the young Alchemist, I felt that there was only one way to bring Choi Kyung-sik to his knees.

Choi Kyung-sik wasn't the type of person to bow his head to someone unless the other could overpower him. I imagined that when he was alive,

Choi Kyung-sik would have been a smart and perhaps arrogant individual that refused to acquiesce to anyone not named Seo Dawon or Kim Olim.

‘He was apparently sued by his former guild?’

I wonder what it took to enter a guild that could sue an outstanding Alchemist like Choi Kyung-sik? The lawsuit must not have originated from a lack of ability on his end; rather, it must have started as a communication problem. After all, in a company one does not work alone.

Eventually, Choi Kyung-sik joined the [Red Lotus] after burning bridges with [Virtuoso]. Fortunately, he met a leader he could respect in Seo Dawon at [Red Lotus] and adapted to guild life.

‘There’s no way such a person would give in to me.’

The only reason he kept this distance from me wasn’t just because he was afraid of losing his own ego…

‘Perhaps his pride couldn’t handle bending to someone like me?’

I felt like I could now understand a small percentage of Choi Kyung-sik’s mind. If I were him, I wouldn’t be able to leave my future in the hands of a guy like me.

However, as I grew to understand the relationship between the Necromancer and Servant, I realized that it was painful for a Servant to maintain that distance.

That’s why I shut his mouth; I’m not so confident about beating Choi Kyung-sik in a verbal war. However, since Choi Kyung-sik was being weirdly stubborn like Seo Dawon, I decided that it would be best to block his main specialty: his speech skills.

As expected, Choi Kyung-sik faltered and couldn’t react to my unexpected behavior. He’s a very intelligent man, but he couldn’t do anything if his opponent engaged with him physically.

Once I overpowered him in such a manner, I observed Choi Kyung-sik for a short while. As I had predicted, once the young Alchemist had pushed past his discomfort at our direct contact, his emotions stabilized and he found an unwilling sense of safety. I looked calmly into his half-dazed eyes and whispered quietly, “From now on…don’t speak so discourteously, Choi Kyung-sik-ssi.”

“……”

“You’re better off keeping your mouth shut.”

Choi Kyung-sik looked at me with a stunned expression. When he tried to say something, I brushed his lips with my fingertips. He flinched and stopped in his tracks.

“I said, don’t speak. That’s right… Stay still.” I continued.

“……”

“If you don’t want to feel too sensitive about my blood, then it’s better to have skinship with me often. Seo Dawon and Kim Olim adapted and overcame their thirst in that manner.”

“……”

“You won’t become more greedy if you drink my blood or touch me directly. I reached this conclusion after observing Seo Dawon.”

Though Choi Kyung-sik’s lips trembled, he didn’t try to contradict me anymore.

Now that I had sealed off his mouthy, cheeky maw, I slowly pulled my hand away. The young Alchemist unwittingly chewed on his lips.

I knew why he was so nervous.

Therefore, I asked him calmly, “It felt good when we touched, right?”

“……”

When I saw Choi Kyung-sik's expression–something vague flickered over his face for a moment–I became a little scared, but, since I had come this far, I shouldn't be discouraged.

As I stood there, fists clenched, Choi Kyung-sik eventually closed his eyes tightly. "…What is it? What do you want me to do?"

"Don't try to force yourself to push me away."

"……"

"It's not only Seo Dawon; Kim Olim sometimes pats my head or holds my hands for no reason. Garam-ie always wants my hugs."

"……"

"I know this feels all instinctual, and I know you want to keep your dignity. Therefore, if you just speak with me, I can help you."

"……"

"At this rate, if I get hurt in battle…The scent of my blood will drive you crazy, like a slobbering dog… Wouldn't that make you look more ridiculous?"

Choi Kyung-sik merely looked at the ground with a deeply agonized expression. However, he soon strode close to my side. Though his face was pale and looked irritated, I wasn't as repulsed compared to his usual mask-like smile.

After furrowing his brows, the young Alchemist hugged me tightly. He stuck his nose onto the back of my neck, and I could vividly feel every time he took a deep breath.

After hugging me like that for a few minutes, Choi Kyung-sik asked me in a tearful voice, "Choi Lee-kyung-ssi."

"….Yes?"

“Are you truly not weirded out by this? That I want to touch you like this?”

“Yes. Choi Kyung-sik has been stubborn for a long time; that’s why it’s all burst out like this.”

“……”

“I’m more worried about Woo Ragi.”

When he heard me, the Alchemist smiled bitterly before dragging me into an even stronger embrace. “Haah… I feel awful.”

“Can you not breathe on my neck?”

“Please bear with me. I’m trying to hold myself back from sucking on your neck.”

I flinched a little at those words, but Choi Kyung-sik simply closed his eyes and stayed in that position for a short while. I stroked his head a few times, hoping to calm him down.

In a weak voice, he said, “I feel like I’m sinning.”

“Because of Dawon-ie?”

“Of course. Actually, is it even okay to act upon my impulses in the first place? Haah… I know we have no other methods available, but still…”

As he spoke, he gently tugged me even tighter, close to his body. He went on, mumbling one-sidedly into the air, “Haah… You know, you’re truly not my type [1] .”

“……”

“What kind of pervert bastard made this condition?”

I held back my laughter and stayed still–his grumbling was similar to mine when I had complained to the Mage.

And, when Choi Kyung-sik felt calm enough, I pushed him away slightly. He obediently retreated a few steps.

“Now, try to hold and be near my blood again. See how it is.”

“……” With a nervous expression, Choi Kyung-sik took out his alchemical toolbox according to my wishes. Then, he opened its closed lid. He put the open lid up to his nose and inhaled.

“How is it?”

“I’m salivating.”

“……”

“But, it seems you’re correct. It’s much more bearable than before.” With that said, Choi Kyung-sik closed the lid of the box. His body now felt much more relaxed.

[Servant, ‘Choi Kyung-sik’s’ friendship level has risen by +100]

A congratulatory message from the system–invisible to the Alchemist–had popped up.

I was almost certain by this point, but the message was another confirmation that my theory held water. So, I let all the tension in my shoulders go and sighed.

Choi Kyung-sik closed the box, looked at me quietly, and asked, “About Woo Ragi-ssi…. What will you do about him?”

“I’m contemplating putting him to sleep with a skill and swooping down on him.”

“……”

“But, I don’t know if that’ll work.”

“You talk about doing something so frightening as if it’s nothing,” he said.

I smiled bitterly. At that moment, Choi Kyung-sik suddenly opened his inventory and handed me a potion in a heart-shaped rounded bottle.

“What is that?”

“It’s a miracle drug that raises affection. It lasts for…about 20 hours.”

“What?”

“It works by external application. Ah, it’s not something strange, understood? As I’ve said, this simply raises someone’s affection for you.”

Stunned, I stared at him with bugged-out eyes. “You want me… to use this on Woo Ragi?”

“I don’t know if it’ll work on him, but, it’s better to try it than to not, yes?”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh wow, is this the advent of Dom Choi Lee-kyung?

Footnotes

1. (Aka he’s saying he’s not gay btw)

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Chapter 303

Chapter 303

After brief contemplation, I eventually took the potion from the young Alchemist's hands. Then, as if he had been expecting that choice, Choi Kyung-sik began to recite how to use it. "You can make Ragi-ssi drink this potion, but you could also apply this to his body. Or his hands."

"…Servants can't drink, though."

"Potions aren't absorbed by the body's digestive system. It's more like an Alchemist's skill." Choi Kyung-sik stopped speaking when I wrinkled my nose at him indulgently, as if I were humoring his pride. However, he continued without dropping his smug smile, "I'll be curious about Woo Ragi-ssi's reaction. If he drinks this potion, the effects should activate immediately."

"How will I know?"

"His expression may change ever so slightly. He's always frowning, but he probably won't look that way at someone he likes or perhaps is beginning to like."

"……"

"Perhaps he'll even show a wide grin?"

I tried to imagine Woo Ragi smiling brightly, but no concrete image would come to mind.

‘Or rather, I think I would find it creepy to see such an expression on his face…’

However, I didn’t want to show any hesitation or weakness in front of Choi Kyung-sik for a long while. I nodded and pointed my chin at the door. “Understood… I hope this potion helps.”

Choi Kyung-sik pouted and grumbled at my body language. “Is he saying that I should leave now that I’ve finished my business?”

“I’m sure you’re disappointed, but I’ll give you another hug next time.”

“Ah, tsk…” Choi Kyung-sik narrowed his eyes for a brief moment, looked at me, but then obediently turned his back to leave. It was only when the door closed with a quiet thud that I could finally relax my stiff posture.

“Haah…” A sigh I had been holding in tumbled out automatically.

I didn’t do anything violent nor physical, but I still felt a lot of mental fatigue. To be frank, my heart kept feeling uncomfortable every time my body made contact with the Servants.

‘If I don’t stay alert at every moment…’

…I kept wanting to give in to their desires. At the very least, Choi Kyung-sik had a strong sense of ego, so I felt that it was easy to endure his touch and leave. If this were Jung Garam, I might have given in to him more as soon as I hugged him.

Furthermore, I have been thinking quite seriously about this subject. ‘Am I fortunate that Seo Dawon is here…?’

If I didn’t romantically like the Mage, maybe my relationships with the other Servants would have become more complicated… After all, mutual interest was easy to increase through skinship.

Of course, I wasn’t particularly pleased with using my body like a tool. But, my heart was the problem. My heart made me think that I’d be willing to give up my body if it was asked of me.

And those thoughts were becoming stronger and stronger. But, it seemed those emotions weren't just a problem for me; the Servants were also in a similar position…

"…I'll need to be incredibly careful."

I stared at the small potion in my hands and sighed once more.

* * *

Contrary to my plans, I had to postpone feeding Woo Ragi the potion; the situation had changed rapidly as news of Ryu Hyerin's disappearance was being reported on the news.

In particular, nothing of the most important aspect, Bae Jaemin's movements, could be detected, so Kim Olim, who was mainly tasked with being aware of the Priest's activity, was tenser than ever.

"Bae Jaemin… canceled all his schedules?"

"It's as if he completely disappeared."

The news covered Ryu Hyerin's disappearance every day, and, alongside various rumors, much attention was paid to the activity of those related to her. In particular, interest in Bae Jaemin spiked, regardless of the audience's age or gender. Under these circumstances, the Priest naturally found it impossible to go about his official business, but…

"I thought he was avoiding the media at his mansion, but that wasn't the case. He's not in his home nor at the guild… As of now, his whereabouts are unknown." Kim Olim continued with a nervous expression, "…It doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel as if he's flustered or panicked by Ryu Hyerin's death. I feel as if he's about to do something…but there's no available information to support this hypothesis."

Seo Dawon, listening quietly, tapped the table with his fingers and muttered, “He must know by now that Ryu Hyerin is dead. And, he must suspect that the [Red Lotus] is somehow connected.”

“Then…what’s the probability that Bae Jaemin suspects me.” I asked the most important question, and all the Servants gathered simultaneously looked towards me.

Though the Mage looked calm, his eyes gleamed coldly. “Probably very high.”

“……”

“If we consider how you were connected to the earlier events… You’ve actually been exposed to Bae Jaemin quite a lot.”

Just as I had expected. I looked back at the Servants calmly and said, “Then, there’s a chance his side could attack us first.”

“……”

“It would be best if we could confront them after we gathered as much power as possible.”

Seo Dawon looked at me briefly. Judging by his expression, he wanted to dissuade me, but he didn’t have another alternative to offer.

The deep fright and anxiety settling on the face of a loved one pierced my heart, but, if Bae Jaemin were to attack us, this would increase our survival rate. The other servants seemed to agree with me, but no one could open their mouths in such a chilly, on-edge atmosphere.

“…That’s right. However, But, in this contract, I…” The Mage started.

“……”

“I honestly don’t know how hurt you’ll be when you return. I can’t judge which is the better option.” Seo Dawon severed the silence and looked straight at me. I felt a little melancholy; I couldn’t even make the promise

that I'd return safe and sound. If I were the Mage, I too would have hated this situation.

But.

"Of course… It'd be best to return with a successful contract."

"……"

"There's really not many left. Therefore…"

"……"

"It'll be fine," Though I may not be reliable–nor was my smile very reassuring–but I replied with my best face forward. Of course, the mage didn't return my smile. Before I lowered my eyes, all I could see on his face was pain.

At that time Choi Kyung-sik asked quietly, "Can't a sacrifice replace some of the risks of the contract?"

Since Seo Dawon didn't move, Kim Olim opened her mouth instead, "Refined or purified blood is important, but… Koo Hui-seo is no longer an option."

Choi Kyung-sik crossed his arms, frowning, "That red-haired person….what was his name again…? What about him?"

Only then did the Mage answer those questions, "We don't have enough time to refine Kim Sangyoon's blood. If the blood isn't refined enough… Well, the amount of blood needed is far too much."

"……"

"Even if you kill Kim Sangyoon, it might not be enough."

Though I was a little concerned at the coldly objective attitude that belied their plans to use Kim Sangyoon as a sacrifice, at the very least a

conclusion was reached. I'll have to take care of this contract by myself, without any cheap tricks

And…

'Considering how the difficulty of the [Vengeful Ghost Memories] increases every time…'

This would be the hardest.

I clenched my fist before forcing it to relax. Then, in a cheerful tone, I said, "Well, who should I summon this time?"

The servants stared at me awkwardly; Kim Olim, after releasing a long sigh, answered first. "I recommend Cho Chan-young."

"The…Summoner?"

"That's right. He's weak against animals and is quite a tender individual… Choi Lee-kyung, if you make the most pitiful expression possible to seduce him… He may be won over easily."

I didn't think such a method would work, but I was too lazy to argue. I scratched my cheek, "Then, I'll go with Cho Chan-young-ssi…"

"I think Bang Eunji would be better." Jung Garam suddenly intervened.

Garam's expression contorted, as if he were unwilling to speak, but he calmly explained the reason why he recommended Bang Eunji through his grumbles, "Bang Eunji has a skill called 'Chaser.' With that, we'll be able to find Bae Jaemin wherever he may be and whatever he may be doing. She used to follow Dawon-hyung around with that. Besides, Hyung also said he couldn't block the 'Chaser.'"

"……"

"Honestly, I like Chan-young Hyung more, but… But right now we need that nutcase Bang Eunji."

Become a Patron!

TL: Bang Eunji is next!!! And, this next Vengeful Ghost memory is… interesting…

Also, that's the first time I've seen Seo Dawon so off his game–so perturbed. I guess the injuries Choi Lee-kyung received from the last Vengeful Ghost Memory (and Koo Hui-seo's nightmare) really shook him up.

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Chapter 304

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“Well, if it’s [Chaser]… Unless Bae Jaemin has died, we’ll be able to find him.” Choi Kyung-sik said while nodding. Woo Ragi frowned wordlessly, but his gaze was on the Mage. He probably intended to follow Seo Dawon’s decision.

“…Then, let’s summon Eunji. And, Lee-kyung-ah.” Seo Dawon called to me in a calm voice.

I looked at him; the Mage grabbed my hand and placed the ring he had worn on his thumb onto my index finger. Though the ring was a little loose, after it shone brightly, the ring shrunk into a size that fit my finger.

[This equipment cannot be used at your current level.]

[At your current level, you cannot determine what this equipment can do.]

Furthermore, the system message couldn’t tell me what this ring did.

However, concerningly, all the other servants except Kim Olim looked shocked and kept sneaking glances between me and the Mage. Realizing that this couldn’t be an ordinary item, I asked Seo Dawon straight away, “What is this?”

“It’s like a guide.”

“What?”

“Even if you get lost… If you wear this ring, I can come and find you.”

Oftentimes in these [Vengeful Ghost Memories], I felt as if another ego was overlaid on mine. Furthermore, I only noticed that something was strange after I had awoken from these memories. If I hadn’t come to my senses within these memories, I would have wandered around the memories of the dead until I ceased to breathe… That was a frightening possibility.

Seo Dawon seemed to have guessed, to some extent, that such a phenomenon existed even if I had never opened up about these difficulties. He grabbed my ring-adorned hand once more, “So, no matter what happens… Don’t give up and wait. Alright?”

“……”

“Because, I’ll be there.”

Eventually, I closed my gaping mouth without answering.

‘I shouldn’t keep leaning on you like this…’

Seo Dawon only smiled faintly at my silent self and then let go of my hand. I felt a dull ache in my slowly numbing heart, but still, I couldn’t answer until the end.

* * *

After a while, I sat on the sofa, dagger in hand, and looked at the servants surrounding me. Lackey leaned against my knee; its skeletal fingers holding my knee were shaking. I patted the skeleton on the head to soothe it.

“…I’ll begin now.”

“……”

Today’s summon felt worse–the atmosphere was more grave–than any summon before. Though everyone’s expression seemed the same as usual, it felt like they were all worried for me.

At that moment, Woo Ragi, who had been silent, suddenly rose from his seat. “I’m going up.”

“…If that’s more comfortable for you, go right ahead.”

“……”

He probably didn’t want to become agitated by the smell of my blood. Understandable–I nodded softly. Woo Ragi glanced at me before climbing up to the second floor without looking back.

“I guess you haven’t used it yet…” Choi Kyung-sik muttered as soon as Woo Ragi vanished from sight. But, I didn’t respond.

Jung Garam seemed to be lost in thought as he played around with a dagger, throwing it up and catching it again. But when he saw Woo Ragi going up to the second floor, he soon placed the dagger on the table. He looked at me and, with a very serious expression, cautioned, “Choi Lee-kyung.”

“Hm?”

“Don’t try to understand Bang Eunji. She’s just a nutcase.”

“Ah… Well.” Inwardly, I wondered why Jung Garam would feel the need to say that.

However, when I thought that he must have given me this advice because he was worried about me, I laughed for no reason. The sound didn’t fit this solemn atmosphere, so I bit my lips hard to smother it.

Kim Olim then grabbed my shoulders from behind and said, “Above all, the most important thing is for you to not forget that you are you.”

“……”

Knowing how much Kim Olim was attached to the [Red Lotus] members, this was quite a touching remark. Her words informed me that I should put myself first and give up the contract if need be.

However, the more she said things like that the more determined I became. I wanted to do my best and revive everyone. Seo Dawon stared at my determined eyes before lowering his gaze; at least he said nothing.

“Don’t worry too much… I’m pretty strong, too!” I said with a wry smile. However, I felt a little embarrassed since all the servants except Lackey sighed simultaneously.

[Clack Clack!]

[That’s right!]

“Haah…”

“Hooo…”

“Hmm…Of course. I think, by now, you’ve gone from a hamster to a rabbit…”

I held the dagger up, pretending that I hadn’t heard what Kim Olim just said. I could feel the surrounding gazes focusing on the blade. Anxiety, expectation… All that pressure was concentrated on one point.

“…I’ll be back,” I said, swinging the dagger mercilessly.

At the same time, a bright light burst out from the magic circle underneath my feet. The sharp pain on my palm gradually dulled; nausea and dizziness welled within me. I closed my eyes without much resistance.

[You've fulfilled the conditions for summoning a Vengeful Ghost.]

[Replaying the Memories of the deceased, 'Bang Eunji.']

* * *

Before I opened my eyes, I experienced a brain-splitting headache. I could barely endure the crushing pain and only just managed to stagger back and touch a smooth wall to stabilize myself.

'This is… Where am I?'

I was impatient to learn what kind of environment I was in, but my body didn't follow my will. I took a deep breath, barely swallowing the stomach acid that threatened to surge up my throat.

It was then.

[…. it looks like it.]

[No. He's very healthy.]

[How long will he live?]

[If you take good care of him…]

Not too far away, I could hear voices ringing around the room–as if I had heard them through a broadcast system.

Reflexively, I tried to open my eyes, but, as soon as I sensed an intense light piercing through my eyelids, I closed my eyes again. The huge amount

of light that poured in would probably make me go blind.

Furthermore, it wasn't just the voice–the thumping and ringing vibrations I could feel from the space around me… I felt threatened and flattened my body. I wanted to see if there was anything nearby I could use to cover up my body, but I couldn't open my eyes to search.

After turning my back towards where the light felt the most prickly, I blinked slowly. Tears leaked from my tear ducts but, firstly and most importantly, comprehending my environment was an urgent matter.

My efforts were not in vain, and I could gradually begin to see ahead of me. And, what I first saw through my blurred vision was…

"What is it… No way, a hamster wheel?"

I stared blankly up at the wheel, which looked large enough to be an amusement park ride.

I looked around again–perhaps I was just unfamiliar with this structure…but no. No matter how hard I looked, it was a gigantic hamster wheel.

However, something even more surprising appeared afterwards.

Suddenly, a long, eerie shadow loomed over me; I looked back reflexively and almost screamed. "……!"

A ginormous person… was staring at me.

Pierced with terror, I could only stare blankly at the person opening what seemed to be a lid above my head and putting their hand inside. There was no place to run; the person was so big that I felt like I would be crushed to death if I were hit by that palm.

As I stood there, frozen, the owner of that hand carefully wrapped their fingers around me and grabbed me gently; but, fortunately, it didn't seem like the person intended to kill me. Warmth flooded into my body.

I sat in the huge hand's grip, sweating as if I were a sieve, and was lifted out of the room containing that gigantic hamster wheel. The owner of the hand unfurled their fingers carefully and lifted me up, as if they were showing me off to someone.

"…Ba… Bang Eunji?"

To my surprise, Bang Eunji, who had become a giant, observed me quite blatantly. However, she didn't respond to my voice at all; she merely investigated my body, as if she were searching for something.

[…He looks a little…vapid… Don't you have a cuter one?]

[Isn't the pattern cute? It's quite a rare coloration.]

[Well….]

[And, since he's young, he hasn't lost the baby fat on his face. If you raise him for a bit, his face is sure to become pretty.]

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Hamster Choi Lee-kyung! I totally believe this all happened bc Kim Olim willed it into existence.

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Chapter 305

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Bang Eunji squinted at me; though the movement was barely anything, her large size made any action look intimidating.

Meanwhile, I flinched back, startled, when she reached a finger out to me; however, I couldn't avoid her since I was trapped in the palm of a hand.

Just like that, her index finger touched my head. I was so nervous, I retracted my neck into my body as much as possible.

[Hmmmm….The fur *_is_* soft.]

Bang Eunji kept rubbing my head as she said that; the force she applied wasn't as much as I had feared. It felt like…she was being cautious with her touch? Of course, though, I felt uncomfortable when Bang Eunji's flashy nail tips touched my forehead.

I patiently endured her petting and, as soon as she removed her finger, instinctively shook my head. Bang Eunji's lips opened slightly when she saw that.

[He~eh.]

I couldn’t tell what she was thinking just by looking at her delicate face. Unexpectedly, she asked the owner for the price.

[How much is he?]

[1200]

‘…Don’t tell me… 12 million won?’ [1]

I paused at the unexpected price; Bang Eunji took out a card without hesitation. The owner of the hand picked up the card and placed me back in the cage.

After this series of events, I could hypothesize what I became. ‘Did I perhaps… Become a hamster?’

My reflection dimly shining on the transparent plastic wall of the cage wasn’t clear, but I could clearly see myself–as I usually was.

Although I was smaller than Bang Eunji or the man who seemed to own this pet shop, I stood on two legs. When I looked down at my hands, I definitely saw two normal human arms… However, the issue was that I didn’t seem to be a human in their eyes.

I clung to the wall of the cage and kept an eye on Bang Eunji, wondering how I should speak with her about the [Vengeful Ghost Contract].

While I was lost in contemplation, the owner, who finished the payment calculations, lifted the entire cage that housed me with a grin on his face and handed Bang Eunji the cage.

Soon after, she left the store and, holding my cage, skipped lightly to her next destination.

‘I’m getting motion sick…’

As dizziness that resembled seasickness surged over me, I caught and held onto the slowly-swaying hamster wheel; there was nothing else I could hold onto other than that. Fortunately, Bang Eunji soon entered a car and I was strapped into the passenger seat.

10 minutes later, we arrived at a wealthy residential complex in the center of the Hub’s downtown.

We seemed to have stopped at her house–an antique two-story building. There was little light in the interior; antique wooden furniture and vivid, primary-colored sofas caught my eye at first glance.

Various shelves and drawers were crammed full of knickknacks; each shelf contained detailed, beautiful dolls. The dolls themselves weren’t scary like Chucky or Annabelle, but, stricken by a strange fear, I tried hard not to look at them. [2]

[Hmm… So I should give him some water and food first?]

Bang Eunji took out a small instruction book from a jewel-studded bag, which was probably given by the pet shop owner who sold me, and read through the pages eagerly.

She soon hoisted a delivery box that had been on the floor onto the large table my cage was placed on and began tearing it open with a knife.

Inside, the box contained small housing goods–minuscule enough that it felt like they were meant for doll houses. Bang Eunji took them to the sink and wiped them clean, one by one, with a pristine cloth. Then, among these small props, she selected a round, white porcelain bowl, filled it with water, and placed it into my cage.

‘It really feels like I’ve become someone’s pet…’

When I froze, uncertain as to what I should do next, Bang Eunji looked at me with eyes laden with expectations.

Just in time–I was thirsty and it felt too burdensome to keep looking at Bang Eunji, so I approached the water bowl she placed in the cage.

[I guess you were thirsty…]

The issue was that, as soon as I took a sip of the water, Bang Eunji relentlessly touched me.

She patted my head enough for her fingerprints to wear off. I ran away to the corner of the cage since I was worried that my neck would become crooked at this rate; she didn’t touch me anymore, but her blatant staring continued.

[Do you want to eat this?]

She tried to attract my attention by placing a few sunflower seeds in her hand. When I didn’t approach, she gently shook the seeds in front of my nose, trying to entice me with its scent.

After she shook the sunflower seeds several times, I became disoriented. In the end, in a fit of anger, I screamed, “I’m not going to eat it!”

I knocked a huge sunflower seed out of her hand, but Bang Eunji’s obsession did not stop.

Eventually, I crouched in the gap between the wheel and the wall–an area she couldn't reach. After looking at me for a while, she poured a lot of sunflower seeds on one side of the cage before turning back to me with an anticipatory expression.

"Haah…" I sighed.

Fortunately, her cell phone rang then; she looked at me with a face full of lingering emotions before going to the other room to receive the call.

I looked in the direction she disappeared before popping out from behind the gap. "Can't I… climb up this?"

I thought that if I were to climb up on the wheel and reach out with my hand, I would be able to barely touch the cage's lid.

So, I looked for something to fix the wheel in place; I discovered the water bowl and brought it to the general location first. Though my clothes became soaked as I moved the bowl–the water inside sloshed around–I didn't mind. After all, escaping this cage was an urgent matter.

"Let's place it here like this…" When I put the bowl vertically in the gap between the teeth of the wheel's axis, the wheel no longer rolled around since the bowl was quite heavy. Afterwards, I climbed up, struggling, and stepped on top of the wheel, but…

"I-It's slippery. Argh!"

The top was higher than I thought, and it wasn't easy to grab onto the sides of the cage. It's not like I had any special equipment either…

My body's balance was already tilted, so it wasn't easy to climb back down again. I was stuck between the wheel and the transparent cage walls.

[Ara?]

At that time, Bang Eunji returned to the room after finishing the call. She caught me very easily and placed me in the palm of her hand.

[Did you try to escape?]

I rolled my eyes, unable to say anything. Bang Eunji pressed at my cheeks hard and poked me here and there before placing me back in the cage. And… she removed the wheel–the only foothold I could use to escape this cage.

“No…!” I tried to protest, but Bang Eunji had already thrown the wheel to the floor.

Then, she took the small furniture items she had carefully washed earlier and began populating the cage, one by one. Princess-style beds, dressing tables, closet drawers, carpets… Well, at least it was better than the hamster-like atmosphere.

I stood in front of the gigantic pile of sunflower seeds in the corner of the room and gave a bewildered stare at the transforming room.

‘I don’t really want to… sleep in a place like this.’

However, the real hardship had yet to pass.

[Hmm… What should I name you.]

Bang Eunji mumbled, poking me in the stomach with her pink, cubic zirconia-embedded nails. Unable to endure this anymore, I leaped to my feet, “My name is Choi Lee-kyung!”

[You’re so small and stupid…Just like that man. Alright, I’ll call you Garam-ie from now on.]

“I said it’s Choi Lee-kyung!!” I protested and tried to move beyond her reach. But, Bang Eunji caught me regardless.

And…

[I prepared a pretty outfit perfect for Garam-kun.]

“W-Wait a minute!!”

Bang Eunji grabbed me, went to a cabinet that housed many dolls, and opened a drawer.

The drawer was filled to the brim with pretty, frilly dresses. When I saw the cute clothes that seemed to fit my size, I was terrified; the blood drained away from my face.

“I don’t want to!” I even bit her finger, but it didn’t seem to hurt. Bang Eunji even rubbed my mouth again. I continued to rebel by biting, but in the end, I ended up with a hurt jaw.

[He’s a total baby.]

And, as a result of that rebellion, the clothes I wore were…

[This is perfect for a baby.]

…a sky-blue baby jumpsuit adorned with a bib.

Become a Patron!

TL : I wonder if this was what my guinea pig’s internal monologues were like:

“DONT TOUCH ME” etc.

Footnotes

1. When the speaker said 1200, they never specified how many zeroes are behind that number.
2. Actually, the names ‘Chucky’ and ‘Annabelle’ were censored in the original. Korean often replaces one syllable with an ‘x’ if something

is a brand or a proprietary name. In this case, Chucky and Annabelle are famous horror movie dolls.

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Chapter 306

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I desperately resisted; I wanted to avoid becoming naked by her hands!!

Fortunately, though, Bang Euji put that terrible baby suit on top of the clothes I was wearing without taking them off. From an outside perspective, I must look terrible as these two clothes overlapped and clashed, but Bang Euji placed me down as if she were satisfied.

As I stood still, tired from the strain of struggling, she took out her cell phone.

[Coo~ Goo goo ga ga~ Look over here~]

“What the…”

I frowned and raised my head, following her voice, and my eyes caught sight of a large camera lens. I covered my face belatedly, but I had already heard a clicking noise. “Don’t take a picture! I said don’t take pictures!!”

Once again, Bang Eunji couldn’t understand, even though I protested with all my might and through exaggerated facial expressions. She snapped pictures of my angry self with a very satisfied look on her face.

Eventually, I covered my face and ran away to some other corner; I could hear her giggling as if my fleeing back was somehow cute to her.

[His butt is so cute. Garam is the best… so pudgy.]

Meanwhile, Bang Eunji pressed firmly on my butt with her finger.

‘I want to die…’ I bowed my head, frustrated, and buried my face in my palms and then my elbows.

No–I definitely made a resolution before I entered this [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. No matter what terrible things may happen, I’ll definitely sign a contract with Bang Eunji and return… I was determined–I wouldn’t give up even if I was seriously hurt or if my life was threatened…

“What is this, though…” In a fit of despair, I tore off my bib and used it to wipe away the tears that rushed out–tears that had welled up due to shame.

However, it was clear that nothing I did reached Bang Eunji who, from her perspective, viewed me as a hamster. She laughed and put me back in the well-decorated, doll-house like cage. She closed the lid carefully, held the cage in her arms, and stepped outside with a spring in her step.

[Ufufu, shall we go shopping with Garam-chan?]

“I’m getting motion sick!!” I screamed and pounded on the cage wall, but that only ended in me staring up at her large fingerprints. Eventually, falling into despair, I laid in bed.

The lace bothered me, but, surprisingly, the bed was high-quality–like a normal human bed. So, lying down relaxed me a little. Still feeling nauseous, I stared up at the wavering canopy, but I soon fell asleep… perhaps because of the mental fatigue.

* * *

[So cute!]

[I think this would look good on him, too.]

Faint ‘kyaa’s’ and cheers passed through my ears; soon, my cheeks felt the sensation of cold air rushing in and brushing past. Thinking the cage door was now open, I pulled the rough, yarn blanket that was covering my body all the way up to my chin.

[It seems he’s still sleeping.]

[Should I not wake him up?]

[How old did they say he was?]

[Less than a few months.]

[Ahh, he’s a total baby.]

Worried about the addition of a new, unfamiliar voice interrupting my sleep, I frowned and opened my eyes. Suddenly, I felt my body floating into

the air; as soon as that happened, all the drowsiness that had dominated my brain fled.

When I hurriedly rose to my feet, I noticed that the bed itself was floating in the air.

“Ahhhhhhghhh!” I screamed, alarmed. But, my desperate scream was soon buried by the sounds of the giant people around me.

[Oho~ How cute… He looks startled.]

[Look at how he’s flattening his body and scrunching in on himself!]

[Should I buy one too? So pretty…]

My heart was still pounding from the surprise; meanwhile, fingers–from people I didn’t know–suddenly approached me.

Of course, I was utterly surprised and scared at how large everyone was. Disregarding my rigid back and face, large fingers approached from every direction to press at my cheeks, feet, hands, and hair. Then, when the touches went towards my stomach and groin, I managed to recover my senses and instinctively laid down to avoid further wandering touches.

[I guess he doesn’t like it when we touch his belly.]

[So cute~!]

[The clothes are super cute on him.]

–Click!

However, my actions only prevented me from being stroked and touched; there was no way to avoid the cell phone cameras.

I bowed my head and bit my lips to keep myself from crying, but I couldn’t endure the pressure of a finger that forced my chin up. The piercing camera-flash lights didn’t go off, but I vividly felt, in the absence of the deafening camera clicks, that all my humiliation was now being filmed.

“I said to stop it!” I couldn’t help but bite down on the next finger that touched my cheek. I truly bit with all my might, but the owner of that finger simply burst into laughter rather than panic, as I had hoped.

[He bit me!]

[Look at the teeth marks…So tiny.]

They were busy giggling, pointing to and peering at the bitten finger. I closed my eyes, despairing. Soon, I heard Bang Eunji’s voice.

[I’m going now. Shall we meet next time?]

[Eunji-nim, bring Garam-ie next time as well!]

[Hmm~ Should I?]

[He’s too cute. Where did you get him?]

[I’ll send you the business card.]

[Thank you.]

Bang Eunji lifted me–face stained with tears–up and saved me from their hands, but I didn't feel one ounce of gratitude. After all, she carried that transparent box in her other hand.

That transparent and adorable box was full of doll clothes, and I guessed she had bought me clothes to wear.

The design of the clothes I was already wearing was bad enough; when I saw a frilly miniskirt and a rabbit-ear headband, I felt like my stomach flipped over. This definitely wasn't something a man who had been to the army and back could wear.

However…. considering the overwhelming difference in power between us, I would eventually be forced into those outfits.

[Garam-chan! Do you know how much your clothes cost me today?]

"……"

[Aren't you happy you met an owner like me?]

Unlike me, who was in a terrible mood, Bang Eunji, humming to herself, was intoxicated by good humor and called herself a great owner.

I shouted in despair, "I'm not happy. You're the one that's happy! I'm just… here to sign a contract with you!"

[Shall we dye Garam-chan’s cheeks too? Pink? I think that’ll be so cute…]

“Are you crazy?!”

[It’ll be very pretty if we dye the tips of his ears a matching color as well.]

I shuddered at her horrifying plans. I didn’t have fur–I had skin; I was disgusted when imagining permanently-dyed pink cheeks. Besides, I don’t know if that would be the end or if she had more in store for me.

I broke out in cold sweat thinking of those puppies that were nearly turned into accessories by their owners. Bang Eunji was… far from a good pet owner. Even now she thought of me as a living doll!

“Please… Someone save me. Please…!” I screamed and banged on the cage wall, but, as has been the case for this whole [Vengeful Ghost Memory], nothing happened.

People passing by on the street glanced at me, but no one focused on my pouting mouth; there was only passing curiosity or a slight smile on their faces–as if they had seen something quite cute. Finally, the fear of not being perceived as human by all others had sunk fully into my brain.

“No….”

Just when I had fully bowed my head, hopeless…

[Omo! Guildmaster-nim…!]

[Hello, Eunji-yah.]

[To think we'd meet here… this truly must be fate!]

[Well, we are in front of the guild building.]

A familiar voice reached my ears. I raised my head up and turned in the direction of Seo Dawon's voice.

The eyes weren't red–quite unfamiliar to me, but that was clearly Seo Dawon. And, within his pupils, was a weak but growing curiosity. Almost rolling towards him, I approached the wall nearest the mage and knocked, "Dawon-ah! Wait…! Save me! Dawon-ah!"

Fortunately, my efforts were not in vain. Seo Dawon bent his knees a little and stared blatantly at me.

'No way–does he recognize me…?'

I looked up at him, full of anticipation, but…

[And, this is?]

[Ah! Let me introduce you: this is my cute hamster… Garam-chan!]

[Garam-ie?]

[Ye~es. This one is small, but he looks exactly like Garam!]

[Haha… You guys are close as always.]

After that one question, Seo Dawon raised his head as if he had lost interest. I stared vacantly at his turned back.

[Still, it’s not good for the hamster to carry him around. He’ll become stressed.]

Seo Dawon explained, adopting a tone one might use towards a young child. I opened my mouth.

I wasn’t sure, but it seemed that, even to the Mage, I appeared to be a hamster. In a way, that was only natural, but I couldn’t overcome this shock and collapsed to the floor.

[There’s no one at home today, so I brought him with me.]

[Mm, alright… Take good care of him.]

[Ye~es.]

Without lingering, Seo Dawon turned his back. I stared after him like a fool before plastering myself to the wall of the cage and shouting, “W-Wait!! Seo Dawon!”

However, the Mage strode away. As I watched the distance between us grow, I shouted with all my strength for one last time, “[Seo Dawon]!”

At that moment, the ring on my finger shone brightly. As the light subsided–like a miracle–Seo Dawon looked back at me.

Our gazes locked again; when his eyes met mine, his pupils widened.

Become a Patron!

TL: The ring!!! Also, can I just say that Hamsters are low-key traumatizing animals for small children? I knew a girl whose hamsters cannibalized each other. Like one ate the other. And the pet store owners said nothing about keeping the two apart (there are some hamsters that can be social and others that are too territorial)

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Chapter 307

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[Wait a minute, Eunji-yah.]

Seo Dawon looked straight at me before stopping his fellow guildmate. She obediently followed his words.

[Yes?]

[That Ham….ster… Can I take a closer look at him?]

[Of course! Guildmaster-nim, do you like hamsters?]

[……]

Seo Dawon took the cage without answering and simply stared at me. With a pounding heart, I worked hard to shout at the Mage, “You did something to the ring, right? Dawon-ah! Are you hearing me?”

[…….]

“Does he see me as my human self right now…? Or does he still perceive me as a hamster?”

Contrary to my expectations, and despite his calm demeanor, I could feel a cold energy in his eyes. As someone who now has known Seo Dawon for a long while, I could recognize the Mage's mask-like smile–something he plasters onto his face quickly when faced with something displeasing.

At first, it was difficult to guess Seo Dawon's feelings solely through his expression; his normal smiles and his mask-like smiles were pretty similar. Later on, I learned to distinguish them through the coldness in his eyes, but…

'Why is he… looking at me like that?'

Seo Dawon's smile, directed towards me, was exuding displeased vigilance.

When pinpointed by that vigilance, something I had not felt from the Mage in ages, I felt somewhat melancholy. Of course, I knew that within the [Vengeful Ghost Memories] I wouldn't be faced with the same Seo Dawon I knew, but…

'Still, that face…'

Should I say I secretly held expectations?

However, Seo Dawon, who could not know how I felt, merely observed my glum countenance and, once again, adopted that damned smile.

[Eunji-yah. This Ham…ster… Can I try raising it for a few days?]

His voice was so confident and attractive; it felt as if rejection wasn't a possibility when the Mage spoke. When I heard his words, though, unreasonable anxiety welled within me. Why did he suddenly want me?

'What on earth do I look like… to Seo Dawon?'

If I seemed like an ordinary hamster, there was no way the Mage would have asked to keep me.

And…

‘I wonder if Bang Eunji will tamely give me away…’

[Of course!]

“……” I stared back at Bang Eunji with a stunned expression.

‘Honestly, didn’t you just brag that there could be no greater owner than you just earlier?’

However, Bang Eunji truly acted like a docile and cute girl in front of her guildmaster. She even placed the costume box she had bought recently–with the tag still attached–in Seo Dawon’s arms. She shamelessly lied–

[Actually, Garam-chan was a hamster I specifically chose with guildmaster-nim in mind!]

[Thank you, Eunji-yah.]

[I knew you’d like him. I-I… I know everything about guildmaster-nim’s tastes…!]

[I guess so. Truly, thank you. Shall we eat a meal together next time?]

[Yes, yes! The location and time…]

[I’ll send you a message with those later.]

[Kyaaa!]

The Mage, after showing a smooth smile to Bang Eunji, strode into the [Red Lotus] guild headquarters with my cage held securely in his embrace.

His strides were wide, but my cage was still less shaky than when Bang Eunji travelled with me. However, I was more anxious with the Mage than with her.

* * *

Aftering entering his private office, Seo Dawon gently placed my cage on the desk and then turned a fixed gaze on me.

He didn't try to talk to me nor did he open the cage; needless nervousness surging in me, I approached the transparent wall, clenched my fist, and tapped on it, "Excuse me… Dawon-ah, you understand what I'm saying…right?"

[……]

He momentarily opened his mouth, but no answer came.

At the same time, the door to the office opened; a man with a large stature entered. When I saw the tattoos covering both arms, I mumbled, "… Jo Chan-young-ssi?"

At that moment, I suddenly felt Seo Dawon quickly turning back towards me; When I flinched and stared back, Jo Chan-young took the initiative to speak.

[Why have I been called?]

His voice was calm yet cold. The Mage seemed to falter a little but soon turned slightly to show Jo Chan-young the cage that was hidden by his standing body.

When Jo Chan-young's eyes gazed into mine, his dark and dry expression changed dramatically.

[What is this…? This cutie.]

"….Mmm?" I felt a little embarrassed and flustered by Jo Chan-young's flushed cheeks which did nothing to alleviate his fierce facial structures.

His sparkling eyes…They felt so passionate–I almost thought he had fallen deeply in love.

Seo Dawon stared at Jo Chan-young as if he were observing the Summoner before releasing a short sigh. Rubbing at his temples, the Mage asked–

[Chanyoung-ie, in your eyes…Does he look like a hamster?]

[Yes? What are you saying… Of course? It's definitely part of the Golden or Syrian breed.] [1]

[……]

[By the way, what logic compelled you to decorate the cage like this? It's not like hamsters are dolls or anything.]

Jo Chan-young peered inside the cage with a repulsed expression and gave the Mage some serious advice.

[Please take off those ridiculous outfits as well. That's abuse.]

[…I'll do that.]

I nodded emphatically since I agreed with what Jo Chan-young said.

However, perhaps the Mage had nothing more to say, Seo Dawon sent the Summoner out of his office. As he left, Jo Chan-young persistently asked.

[Are you going to raise that cutie here?]

[I'm still thinking about it.]

[If that's the plan, I can take care of him]

[Thanks. You're very reassuring.]

Until the end, Jo Chan-young continued to gaze at me. For some reason, it was hard to tear my eyes away from his, so I waved farewell to the Summoner. Jo Chan-young's eyes sparkled once more, but a thick door soon blocked our line of sight.

Thud–!

[……]

Once again, the Mage looked at me as soon as the door closed. My anxiety, which had subsided a little, began to rise again.

However, as he glared, Seo Dawon said nothing and merely unfurled his palm. When I saw a magic circle floating above his hand, I opened my mouth in surprise. 'No way… Is he going to attack me?'

I was so startled, my eyes were wide open. The magic circle spun–its interlocking components clicked like a puzzle…but…Nothing much happened. My body glowed a faint gold–that's it.

However, even after casting this unknown spell on me, Seo Dawon's furrowed brows did not relax. I wrung my fingers nervously–a nervous habit that often appeared when things didn't go my way.

After a long period of silence, he finally spoke.

[What skill is this? Or maybe…An item effect?]

"…What?"

[Why are you disguised as a hamster? Or rather… how did you–even briefly–fool my eyes?]

"You… You can see me? Or can you hear me?]

[I wonder if he wants to pretend to be ignorant.]

His tone was clearly sarcastic, but, the moment he spoke straight me, the Mage truly seemed like a savior.

I cried out to Seo Dawon, wiping my tears away with the sleeves of this uncomfortable, unnatural baby suit. “Da-Dawon-ah! Hnngh…”

[……?]

Seo Dawon looked quite bewildered when he saw me burst into tears out of nowhere.

However, I continued to yell at him through this transparent wall. “W-What a relief. At least you can see the real me…”

[……]

“I… My cheeks were dyed a weird color… No, that’s not the problem– Everyone is treating me like a hamster! I’m so lonely and helpless… What’ll I do if I’m stuck here, eating sunflower seeds forever…”

[……]

“Hngh…”

Still looking bewildered, the Mage listened to the end of my rambles.

I flopped to my feet, still crying, and tried to take off my outfit first; the bib tightening around my neck and the jumpsuit was incredibly annoying. I wiped my tears with one hand and pulled at my bib with the other when, suddenly, I felt the airflow around me change. The cage lid had opened.

When I looked up, I saw Seo Dawon staring down at me.

“B-By the way… Can you take this off for me?”

[……]

I raised both arms high into the air.

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my god, the mental image of Lee-kyung as a hamster is too adorable but… Hamster no! That Mage doesn't know you!

Footnotes

1.

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Chapter 308

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How many times in my life would I have the chance to see Seo Dawon’s dumbfounded expression?

When I saw his face, I lowered my raised arms. His expression was cold–cold enough to scare my falling tears back into their tear ducts.

But…

[It seems our relationship is one-sided; you speak as if you know me.]

“…What?”

[Come to think of it, I didn’t ask you the basics. What’s your name?]

Seo Dawon asked as he lowered his hand into the cage and pressed at the area between my head and back.

Soon after, I felt something tickle the back of my neck; the bib’s strap tightened around my neck was loosened. When the bib slid down, I was able to relax a little; I realized that Seo Dawon wasn’t trying to crush me.

The same was true of the baby suit. With a soft touch and a little force, the zipper on the back descended.

I pulled my arms out of the sleeves in a hurry. Only then could I see the hoodie and jeans I always wore. Finally feeling refreshed, after a deep breath, I told the Mage, “Th-Thanks…”

[Then, you should answer now.]

“What?”

[Who are you?]

That was a problem–Seo Dawon didn’t seem to recognize me.

To be honest, I thought there was a trick hidden in the ring. Before light leaked from that accessory, Seo Dawon only saw me as a hamster, but after the light show, he perceived me as human. I thought the situation had been solved by some unknown skill–by the Mage’s skill.

However, Seo Dawon’s gaze still held a deeply entrenched vigilance.

‘…What should I do?’

Now that I had finally escaped the panic of becoming a hamster, anxiety related to Seo Dawon poured into my body. ‘Did I approach him too hastily?’

The reason why I came here was to sign a contract with Bang Eunji, but now I’m foolishly grappling with Seo Dawon… And, I didn’t even know where Bang Eunji was…

‘How should I explain this?’

Above all, I was at a loss for how I could ask Seo Dawon for his help and cooperation. After all, it would be impossible for me to escape this cage without his help.

However, this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] was a difficult skill to explain to anyone that wasn’t a Necromancer or their Servant.

Of course, Seo Dawon was a smart individual; if he believed my words held some value, he may believe me. But, I couldn't afford to be optimistic about this situation–I haven't figured out what clues this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] wanted to provide.

In the worst-case scenario, I may have to run away from Seo Dawon. At that thought, cold sweat ran down my back and hips.

[Don't think too hard.]

However, my hesitation only seemed to instill suspicion in the Mage.

He pushed my head with a finger, though not hard enough to hurt, and then suddenly began to raise my hoodie. I had been absentminded, but I snapped to attention and screamed, "W-W-What are you doing?!"

[I thought you wanted me to take off your clothes?]

"Not these! These are my clothes!"

[……]

"I said, don't take them off!!" I pushed at the Mage's finger with all my might and shouted with a reddened, flushed face. However, Seo Dawon didn't let me go; with a few fingers, he crushed me against the cage floor.

Moreover, he began to stick his fingernails into the waistband of my pants rather than the hoodie. I had no choice but to give in and answer his question because I was sure that I would really suffer the shame of having all my clothes peeled off.

"M-My name is Choi Lee-kyung!"

[It's the first time I've heard that name.]

With that said, the Mage's fingers were still trying to peel off my clothes.

I protested, crying out in shock, "H-Hold on! I answered you!"

[Are you so famous that people will recognize you with just your name?]

“What?”

[It’s not, right? This is the first time I’ve heard that name.]

“……”

[I asked ‘who’ you were.]

What a relentless, merciless attitude.

Only then did I realize that Seo Dawon had no goodwill for me; he treated me ruthlessly within this memory, as he might with others outside.

I closed my mouth, now even more afraid; however, my reluctance to speak must have been perceived as a rebellion.

Seo Dawon stopped lifting the hem of my clothes and began to press the fingers down on my front. In that instant, that force pressed on my organs; it felt like my ribs were being snapped from my spine.

“Hnnghh…” I struggled to breathe in.

The Mage continued to press until the point of pain and whispered quietly–

[If I press any harder, your stomach might burst.]

“D-Dawon-ah… Please.”

[How do you know my name, ‘Choi Lee-kyung?’]

“Ugh…Aghhhh…!”

Seo Dawon pressed sharply at my chest a few more times as if he were about to crush my lungs. And, when I couldn’t breathe, he picked up the water bowl Bang Eunji placed inside the cage and slowly poured the water over my head.

As the cold water flowed down my face, my oncoming blackout was chased away–not that it made me happy.

Seo Dawon, in a low tone, asked again–

[…I don’t think you made yourself like this.]

“Cough… Cough…”

[Then, who cast this skill on you? Or, is this an item?]

“……” Of course, I couldn’t answer. I was so afraid of this ‘Seo Dawon,’ my lips just wouldn’t open.

His eyes curved into a smile as he looked at my horrified expression.

[Ah, there’s something I’m most curious about. How do you know me?]

“……”

[It bothers me that you call my name as if we’re somehow close.]

“……”

[I must have been pretty nice to you, hm?]

Eventually, I couldn’t endure these questions and vomited a little.

Seo Dawon just observed me wheezing and coughing. Since I was lying face down, I felt as if the surging vomit blocked my airways. If Seo Dawon hadn’t lifted me up, I may have suffocated to death.

Seo Dawon lifted me up and placed me in the toy bathtub that Bang Eunji had placed in the cage.

“……”

Then, he began to undress me again. This time, I couldn’t even tell him to stop and simply closed my eyes. Rather than shame, fear and pain were

weighing down my entire body. Once I stopped rebelling, Seo Dawon easily took off my clothes.

[Is he something similar to a Chimera?]

"……"

[I really don't know.]

I lowered my head and looked down at my body; I only had a single piece of underwear left.

The stinging pain in my chest was more urgent than the humiliation I felt. Though my ribs may not have broken…they definitely cracked.

I worried that I would be tortured to death by the Mage if this continued. Then, I wouldn't ever be able to return Bang Eunji back to life.

'That's not…the real Seo Dawon anyway…'

So, barely holding back the rising tears, I bowed obsequiously to the Mage. My trembling fingertips felt cold, but I judged the Mage would not inflict unnecessary pain if I looked cooperative enough.

No–I absolutely needed to look pitiful.

If I endure more torture, my mind won't be able to endure. It would be better to suffer as a hamster in Bang Eunji's possession.

If Seo Dawon continues to treat me as someone worthless, then I'll…

"…I-I can't really talk about it… Right now…"

[Speak louder, Lee-kyung-ah.]

"……"

However, when Seo Dawon called out to me in a friendly manner–as he usually did–tears leaked out of my eyes automatically.

Seo Dawon lifted my jaw with his finger; I was still mumbling while swallowing back my tears. He still stared at me with that brutally distant expression and asked deep questions I couldn't exactly answer truthfully.

"Don't… me…. Don't hit me…"

[……]

"I… didn't… come here with the intention of doing something bad to you…"

I gathered all my courage and began to speak, but whether or not my heart and emotions were properly conveyed to the Mage was questionable.

He stood still, staring at me, before pressing at my tear-stained cheeks.

[Why do you look so betrayed?]

"……"

My shoulders trembled at his mumbles; when our gazes locked, Seo Dawon's eyes narrowed. Distrust and curiosity–he wavered between those two. Soon, as if he came to a decision, he took his hands off my body.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: The ruthless guildmaster–honestly Lee-kyung, you could've guessed that Seo Dawon would be cruel to unknown enemies. Though I can't blame

him for wanting a familiar face when he’s being so utterly humiliated by Bang Eunji >.<

The torture does hurt to read, though.

But!!! Seo Dawon is in this Vengeful Ghost Memory! And guys… this one really ramps up.

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That was the last thing I remembered.

Afterwards, I lost the battle with exhaustion, and when I opened my eyes again, I was still laying on the bed in this terrible cage. And my clothes had been changed.

"……"

I stared at the white dress I wore before sighing. I knew I vomited towards the end so I needed to change my clothes, but… Why a dress, of all things?

"Haah…"

No matter how much I grumbled, though, an answer wouldn't materialize out of thin air. First, I checked my body here and there, but I didn't feel much pain–not even in my chest, where I might have expected cracked ribs.

All that lingered was a numbing feeling–characteristic after drinking a potion–and a menthol-like scent left in my mouth.

'Did he give me a potion…?'

When I looked to the side, I saw a pipette I had never seen before sticking out of the ground between the closet and the bed. The Mage must have fed me the potion with that pipette.

I realized that Seo Dawon must have decided to keep me alive…for now. Of course, I wasn't sure if that was a good thing just yet.

'He healed me, but… Wait–Where's Seo Dawon?'

I could only hear the ticking sound of the second hand of the clock; there was no one else in the office. Even the lights were off–the only source of light was the sunlight flooding in through the window.

I sat on the bed and looked around at the office through the transparent walls of the cage.

As I looked carefully at the high-quality furniture, books that had half Chinese 'Hanja' characters/ half Korean characters on their spines, [1] and a personal planner…My eyes alighted upon a frame near the cage.

"Ahh…."

I thought the frame would contain a picture of him or those close to him, and, as I expected, it contained a picture of the Red Lotus members.

With Seo Dawon placed in the center, everyone was smiling brightly and refreshingly. Of course, Bae Jaemin and Ryu Hyerin were also there, but they didn't look particularly out of place. They appeared to just be kind and affable.

I smiled–the picture was taken at the moment Seo Dawon placed his arm around Woo Ragi's shoulders, and there was nothing the Swordsman could do about it…but, after a while, a strange emotion filled me.

"This is the past… I wonder where in the timeline I am?" I mumbled and scratched my head.

At that moment.

Click–

Suddenly, the office door opened, and Seo Dawon strode inside. His eyes were fixed on me from the moment he opened the door.

“Th….Thank you,” I said.

[What?]

“You fed me… a potion, right?”

As soon as I made eye contact with him, the first thing that tumbled out of my mouth was my gratitude. However, Seo Dawon smiled a bit crookedly, as if he had heard something absurd.

[It seems like you’ve forgotten who hurt you, Lee-kyung-ah.]

“…Th-That’s true, but.”

[Well… I suppose that’s still a good attitude. After all, I’m the one holding your life in my hand.]

“……” I closed my mouth and felt sullen at his cold tone.

Despite his sarcastic expression, the Mage stared at me as if he were looking at something odd. Meanwhile, now that our conversation was cut short, I became lost in my thoughts again.

‘It doesn’t feel like he’ll press down on me with his fingers or harass me in another way…’

If that were his intention, there would be no need to treat me with potions. So, I left the bed and ran towards Seo Dawon.

The Mage paused but soon moved closer to the cage. After a few, ground-thumping vibrations, he quickly stood in front of me.

I looked at his large, beautiful eyes and made great efforts not to tremble in his presence, “Excuse me… I am really not trying to do anything bad to you.”

[……]

“Of course, with your personality, you’re not likely to believe anyone that says this, but… T-Take a look at me. What can I do to you with a body like this…?”

[……]

I looked up at him and tried to make reasonable arguments, but the vigilance did not disappear from the Mage’s eyes. He then muttered, as if he were talking to himself–

[He must know ‘my’ personality well.]

“Huh? Ah, th-that’s…” Come to think of it, this ‘Seo Dawon’ wouldn’t know me, and I may be crossing the boundary by calling out to him affectionately and acting as if I knew him.

Belatedly realizing I made a mistake, I covered my mouth with both hands, but Seo Dawon had already opened the cage lid and was reaching out to me.

I trembled and squeezed my eyes shut, uncertain as to what would happen. Soon, I felt an irresistible force holding on to me; then, my body rose into the air.

However, the pain I had been expecting and preparing for never came, no matter how long I waited. I stealthily opened my eyes. When that happened, the Mage opened his mouth, as if he had been waiting for my attention.

[I searched the database of Users in the Hub for the name ‘Choi Lee-kyung,’ but… Nothing appeared. It was very clean.]

“……”

[There’s no human being like you there.]

As I listened to the Mage, I gently grabbed his thumb with both my hands. He said he was holding me tight, but I felt anxious; my legs felt hollow, as if I couldn’t gain a proper foothold.

Seo Dawon furrowed his brows but did not shake off my hold. He urged me to answer, again, with a look that stated his patience was being tried.

[Did you give me your real name?]

“Yeah…”

[But, why isn’t your information in the database?]

“I-It’s not something I did…”

Seo Dawon’s gaze became even colder; I shrugged and avoided his eyes.

Since the original ‘me’ does not exist in this timeline, it was natural for him to be unable to find my information. However, there was no good way to explain that.

And, after my suspicious answer, Seo Dawon’s hand tensed and contracted momentarily before relaxing again. Startled, I looked at him.

Of course, our current atmosphere wasn’t reassuring. The Mage looked annoyed, but soon questioned me again in a cold voice.

[Then, how do you explain why you’re acting as if you know me well?]

“…You… You….”

Of course, I had no decent answer to this question either. The betrayal that Seo Dawon would soon experience and his subsequent revival had yet to occur.

So, I lowered my head and muttered in a barely-audible voice, “…B-Because you’re famous…”

[……]

“And I’m… Your fan. I-I did some research…”

[……]

“It’s nothing bad… I’m just… a stan…” I didn’t say all this with the expectation that the Mage would believe me. It was just a crude excuse for my inexplicable circumstance.

My fear surged again when I felt his cool gaze rest on my head; he raised my head again.

If Seo Dawon loosened his hold and sent me crashing to the floor, I would be lucky to survive; my legs would certainly be smashed, though. Frightened, I clasped his thumb tightly with both arms again.

But…

“……”

Grrumble–

A loud noise suddenly rumbled from my stomach.

In fact, a few more grumbles happened; from then on, an extreme, desperate hunger crawled its way into my stomach. How tactless of my stomach; I hid a bright red face in the crease of his finger.

‘…Did he hear that?’

Maybe he didn’t hear; I had hope for just a moment.

However, Seo Dawon used the tip of his thumb to raise my chin.

[You must be hungry…]

“……”

[You said you disliked sunflower seeds, right?]

I felt that Seo Dawon’s expression had now softened. Rather, he had an amused smile on his face, as if he were staring at something funny.

I was disgusted at that face. My Servant, ‘Seo Dawon’ often mischievously teased me with that expression.

In a fit of temper, I curtly said, “I want milk…and cereal.”

[……]

“If you’re going to give me something to eat, you should give me something I like…”

Of course, I was scared by the Mage’s expression in the middle of my tirade, so I hurriedly glanced elsewhere and avoided his gaze.

Seo Dawon didn’t threaten me anymore and placed me back in the cage. He laid me atop the bed and stared blatantly at me for a few more beats. However, soon, he turned around and left the office.

Click–

It wasn’t until I heard the door close that my body released its tension. At that moment, my hunger grew more intense. My stomach no longer produced the occasional rumbling and instead incessantly grumbled.

“Did he decide to ignore me…?”

As I recalled the silent, answer-less Mage, I looked at the sunflower seeds piled up at one end of the cage. If I’m in a pinch, I suppose I’ll be forced to eat those seeds, but…

“I’m not a hamster…” I muttered sullenly.

It was then.

Click–

The door opened again. I turned to the origin of the noise; there stood Seo Dawon, carrying 200 mL ^{2} of white milk and a small amount of mini-cereal in both hands.

Become a Patron!

TL: My favorite “kidnapped” trope is when the captured person just demands niceties (like good food…although I guess cereal isn’t really gourmet) and gets them.

Also, I still have some pain symptoms in my arms so I’m not tl’ing as much ya’ll. I’ll be slow–but I do have the schedule in my discord. I’m glad I’m going on vacation to Portugal next week tbh. Gives me time to rest.

Footnotes

1. Choi Lee-kyung notes this as particularly special since, while most children learn Hanja characters, it’s still a mark of good intelligence to real books with Hanja in them. You’re essentially bilingual for Hanja at that point–though you won’t know Chinese with just Hanja.
2. about a cup for the American readers – PR Frogs

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Chapter 310

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“Huh…??” I was flustered by the unexpected kindness. Seo Dawon looked at me, but his actions were still a bit rough. He tossed the cereal into a small bowl and splashed a little milk inside.

The problem, though, was that the bowl was too small to contain so much cereal. Still, the bowl’s size fit me well, so, as soon as the Mage released his hand, I took the bowl and drank the milk first.

Only after I drank a lot of cereal-sweetened milk did I finally feel lucid. At that moment, I realized that I had been starving.

[Do you want more?]

“Mmm…”

As I frantically drank, the Mage asked if I wanted more; I looked up at him, a little wary, but the desire to drink more milk overcame my vigilance.

When I nodded, new milk was poured in. After drinking it all, I took great care to chew the soggy cereal pieces.

Suddenly, a shadow fell over my head.

“……?” Startled, I looked up, distracted from my meal; soon, Seo Dawon’s fingers began to press at my head. Even though I became rigid

with surprise, he continued to pat my head…regardless of my unease.

“Wh-What are you doing?!” I was momentarily dazed, but soon anger flared within me at the thought of being treated like a pet. I shook my head.

However, Seo Dawon smiled mysteriously and pushed at my forehead with a finger. Staggered by the force, I flopped to the floor.

This was truly offensive and humiliating. I bit my lips as I glared back at the Mage. And Seo Dawon, meeting my protesting gaze head-on, responded in an indifferent tone–

[What’s with the attitude–I even gave you food?]

“…What?”

[I have no intention of killing you for a while, so don’t be too wary.]

“……?”

Honestly, what does petting me have anything to do with feeding me…

Just as I thought that, the Mage suddenly reached into the cage, grabbed me, and pulled me out. Wracked with nervousness, my body automatically shrank into itself.

Seo Dawon placed me in the palm of his hand and rummaged around the cereal box with his other hand, before bringing a cereal piece to my lips.

“What are you…”

[Say, ‘Ah,’ Lee-kyung-ah.]

His voice seemed to be half-amused, half-sweet and friendly; my mouth opened reflexively.

However, since the speed at which he lifted the cereal to my mouth was so fast, it banged into my front teeth. I automatically frowned. Seo Dawon saw that expression and handed me the cereal at a much slower pace.

I was flustered momentarily by the unexpected kindness, but after catching Seo Dawon's strange expression, my mood obviously plummeted.

The Mage observed me as if he were looking at something incredibly fascinating–Why did his relaxed smile look particularly despicable today?

'Seo Dawon… I'm sure he doesn't consider me a fellow human being…'

Idiot.

Swearing inwardly, I nibbled and swallowed the cereal.

As soon as I finished my piece, he handed me another; I turned my head to refuse his offering. Fortunately, the Mage didn't force me to eat.

[You're already full even though you haven't finished half of your meal?]

"……"

[Or, do you want me to give you something else?]

"……"

[Should I give you some fruit, Choi Lee-kyung?"

"What are you going to give me…?

[Whatever you want to eat.]

I wasn't in a position to stubbornly endure and stand my ground. Though I was annoyed he treated me like a pet, his shallow regard was necessary for my immediate survival.

Therefore, I decided to accept Seo Dawon's arrogant behavior for this short while.

"……"

However, I became truly angry when a strawberry larger than my face entered the cage. Seo Dawon giggled as he observed my behavior.

“Cut it for me! I’m not some kind of animal… I don’t want to nibble at it whole!”

[Lee-kyung-ie is high maintenance, hm?]

Seo Dawon clicked his tongue and treated me like a fastidious person, but he gently sliced the strawberry and placed it on a small, toy-like plate. He even created a fruit fork (?) [1] by breaking a toothpick in half.

As I looked at the Mage, I thought I needed to remind him continuously, into the future, that I was a human being. Though…I didn’t know how much longer I would be here.

The strawberry was more delicious than I expected, so I ate all of the cut pieces delightfully. After seeing the empty plate, though, I felt a little embarrassed.

[You’re kind of funny.]

A smile on his lips, Seo Dawon said this meaningfully as he observed me. And, from that day on, he started taking me to work in that cage.

* * *

“Excuse me, um… What are the other guild members doing now?”

[Why are you curious about that?]

Like that, a week or so flew by. Little by little, I had become accustomed to living in a cage.

Seo Dawon began to treat me so kindly that I almost forgot his scary demeanor when we first met. While continuing to try and read his body language, I searched for an excuse to meet Bang Eunji.

However, his expression turned rigid every time I brought up the topic.

'When will he drop his wariness…?'

Considering the Mage's sensitivity and perfectionist tendencies, there's probably a long way to go, but… I looked up at him while swallowing my sigh, "It's just… I'm curious about…what Bang Eunji-ssi is doing."

[She's doing well.]

"……"

Seo Dawon cut off our conversation so abruptly that I may have been embarrassed in any other situation. But, when I stared up at him, he smiled softly. In a gentle tone, he added–

[Raise your hands into the air.]

"……"

[Quickly.]

I wanted to change my clothes myself, but Seo Dawon, embarrassingly, wanted to take care of outfitting me. Even when I opened the closet, there were no clothes inside. Instead, day by day, he directly dressed me in whatever he pleased.

Of course, I mentioned that I could put on the outfit on my own, but my opinion was dismissed. However, I couldn't wear the same clothes for several days in a row, so, in the end, I had no choice but to surrender. Every time the Mage changed my clothes, I felt like a doll.

"You're a pervert…" Of course, I couldn't resist throwing barbs. After all, this was an incredibly weird thing to do. From Seo Dawon's standpoint,

wouldn’t it be easier to throw the clothes in the cage and let me take care of myself?

However, after hearing my complaint, Seo Dawon snorted and retorted–

[What are you saying? You’re the hamster who broke into a little girl’s house.]

“I-I didn’t do that on purpose! How many times must I…”

[Then, you should explain better when I ask who placed you there.]

“……”

[Pervert.]

The Mage smiled. Though that was the face of my most beloved person, I hated that expression and wanted to scratch and tear at his face.

Perhaps because I grumbled that he was a pervert, the clothes that Seo Dawon had taken out today were truly loathsome.

A maid dress.

It even had a miniskirt that clearly showed the skin above the knees. I tried not to wear the dress, but… Seo Dawon simply overpowered me. As I struggled, he even placed a frilly headband on my head.

[If you take off your headband, I’ll strip you. Alright?]

Seo Dawon smiled as he threatened me with a hand on my head.

Tears threatening to well up, I shouted, “I’d rather wear no clothes than wear something like this!”

[Really? I won’t let you keep your underwear, then.]

“…What?”

[If you want to be truly naked, then try and take it off.]

Seo Dawon looked as if he would follow up on his promises. In the end, my defiance fizzled out and I sat on the palm of his hand, disconsolate.

The Mage looked at me quietly, fiddled with my clothes, and placed me on the sofa before leaving the room. I sighed deeply as I looked around his bedroom.

“What on earth is he thinking…”

I stared at the changed furniture in the cage; Seo Dawon’s intentions were becoming increasingly enigmatic.

Actually, about three days after I was caught by the Mage, the cage’s interior changed completely.

The cage’s size was larger than before; the interior design of the miniature furniture changed as well. Before, the aesthetic resembled a princess-style room, but now the cage felt like a regular modern home.

Furthermore, the typical, transparent hamster cage was now changed to a two-floor doll-house-like structure.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my god. SEO DAWON! A MAID DRESS?? And you're dressing Lee-kyung-ie up like a doll? And hand-feeding Lee-kyung-ie? This has to be a fetish right?

He's really not wrong when he said that all Rankers are perverts.

Footnotes

1. That's a two-tined fork normally used for eating fruit. Why do we need a separate fork for fruit? I have no idea tbh.

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Chapter 311

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Of course, my life became a lot more comfortable, but my anxious feelings were not yet resolved. If I wasn't going to live here forever, it would be meaningless to adapt to this kind of life.

'Isn't there a way to avoid Seo Dawon's notice and meet up with Bang Eunji?'

I wracked my brain again and again.

Though Seo Dawon continued to travel with me, to and fro, we weren't together all the time. He kept me in his office when he came to work and left me alone for a few hours, citing he had a meeting or whatever.

'If I use that time well, I may be able to meet Bang Eunji…'

However, problematically, the Mage locked the cage door whenever he was away.

Seo Dawon only opened the door to the house when he was there and closed my only means of escape when he was absent. In other words, I couldn't leave the house by myself while he was away.

'Last time, I tried to exit through the window, but the windows wouldn't open at all…'

In fact, Seo Dawon even cast a few skills on this home. Despite being a doll house, the home had running hot water, the kitchen could function with

induction stovetops, and the lights could turn on and off. Therefore, the inability to open the windows reflected the Mage's will.

'What must I say in order to get out of here…'

If I said something wrong, the Mage would become warier. I wracked my brain for an escape method that wouldn't raise his guard.

'Should I say I want to take a look outside?'

However, if I used this method, I thought Seo Dawon would merely place me on his hand so I could take a quick 'peek.' He may even become suspicious of why I wanted to go outside so badly.

'Or, should I ask him to call Bang Eunji here?'

However, it was least likely that Seo Dawon would comply with this method. Furthermore, I had no plausible excuse to request a meeting with Bang Eunji… Besides, he reacted so sharply when I simply asked how she fared.

"Haaah…" A deep sigh tumbled from my lips.

As I tore my hair while contemplating repeatedly, Seo Dawon entered the office with a loud bang.

Immediately afterwards, he unlocked the loop he installed in front of the house and opened the door. Then, he inspected me, who sat on the sofa. As I made eye contact with the Mage, I was unable to school my expression.

[What's with you?]

"…..Huh?"

[Does your head hurt?]

The Mage must have seen my agonized expression.

'……!'

At that moment, a brilliant idea struck me. Playing along, I frowned even more. I pretended to be weak and lacking energy. I avoided his eyes. “It… it hurts.”

[It hurts?]

“Mhmm…”

[So suddenly?]

I avoided his gaze as much as possible–I knew well how awkward my expression became when I lied. So, I turned around and crushed my face onto the back of the sofa. As soon as I rubbed my forehead on the soft velvet, I was seized by my shoulders.

‘D-Did he catch me in my act…?’

When I looked back at him, startled, Seo Dawon stared at me with a hitherto unseen grave expression. He placed his index finger on my forehead–not to push and apply pressure, as he had done before, but to try and measure my temperature.

However, once he touched my forehead, he removed his finger immediately. He muttered to himself–

[What kind of foolish…]

“Uh…Huh?”

[Hold on one second. I’m going to retrieve a thermometer.]

Then, Seo Dawon left the office.

As I looked stupidly at the door he exited through, I suddenly had a realization: Seo Dawon left the doll house unlocked. The office door hadn’t been closed properly, so I could see the world outside through a gap. Perhaps he was….flustered when I stated I felt sick?

"…I feel a bit guilty…" I scratched my cheek. However, I couldn't let this opportunity go, so I quickly exited the doll house. After stepping on nothing but carpet for so long, I began to feel a strange anxiety when I stepped on the hard desk.

"It's higher than I thought…?" The problem, though, was that as soon as I stood at the edge, I became frightened at the unexpected height that awaited me.

'If I fall from here, I'll be wounded seriously…'

However, rather than lingering, I quickly crossed the desk to the other side; I didn't know when Seo Dawon would come back and push a thermometer at me.

And, there, I found a trash can with shredded documents underfoot. The wastebasket was right next to the desk, and, at first glance, the paper shreds were piled up high enough that someone would need to empty it out soon.

"…Can I survive this jump?" I swallowed and looked down. Then, I looked at the office door behind me. My eyes could only imagine how the door would open at any moment.

"…Damn!" I stood on the edge of the desk, trembling. Then, while swearing, I eventually jumped off. I wouldn't have another chance if I didn't escape now.

Shuffle–

Fortunately, just as I had guessed, the noodle-like shredded documents served well as a buffer.

Furthermore, I didn't fall through the trash as deep as I had feared, and I was able to grip the rim of the trash can and haul myself over to the other side. Although the trash can was quite tall, I was able to land on the floor gently by sliding down, and holding the corners of the trash can with my arms.

“Whew… Haah…” Of course, this was an experience I never wanted to repeat. I swallowed back my saliva as I stared at the desk…the height I had fallen from. Fucking high. I mean–it felt taller than a 5 story building… I sat for a bit, but I couldn’t appreciate my feat of bravery for too long.

“Let’s go…!” I ran towards the door as fast as I could. The reality that Seo Dawon might return at any point and encounter me in front of his office door galvanized my thigh muscles.

I arrived at the door, panting, and looked outside through the small gap. Fortunately, there were no signs of movement in the hall.

“Haah…” Looking carefully at the corridors on both sides, I searched for a place to hide my body, and I noticed a fire extinguisher not too far away.

I half-rolled half-scurried to the extinguisher and hid. And, almost simultaneously, someone else stomped quickly towards my way.

It was Seo Dawon.

“……” I saw that he held something in his hand, but I shook my head. There was no time to be sentimental. He’d soon notice my absence and subsequent escape, thus he’d search this area soon.

I patted my thighs to loosen the muscles, turned my back, and ran.

* * *

[We repeat: All personnel within the building should cooperate with the search operation to find a golden-brown hamster. If found, report to Seo Dawon-nim immediately. Furthermore, we add the important point that the hamster must be captured alive and should never be forcibly handled.]

My ambitious escape was discovered in less than an hour.

And now, I hid in the gap in the ventilation shaft to avoid people's eyes. This hiding spot surely wouldn't last long.

"Seo Dawon, you crazy bastard…!"

A strange broadcast tone had blared throughout the building 30 minutes after I ran from the room. With that strange warning sound, the people in the offices rose from their seats, anxious expressions lining their faces. This was proof that the broadcast was no ordinary event.

Following that tone, Seo Dawon shamelessly broadcasted an announcement to have others help find his lost hamster. Of course, I guessed that he would attempt to find me, but even I didn't think he would make a public announcement, as if I were a lost child in an amusement park.

Of course, I tried to avoid other people's eyes in my original plan, but I thought I'd have more leeway since, to them, I appeared to be a normal hamster… Now, everyone in the building combed through hallways, shining flashlights into all sorts of nooks and crannies. It was clear that if I wandered around in this situation, I would be found immediately.

It was impossible to predict what would happen if I were to be caught and returned to the Mage. Since I heard I was wanted alive, I didn't think he would kill me, but… That didn't mean I'd be left in a good condition.

"I can't get caught anymore…"

Above all, I had a strong feeling that if I were caught here, the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] would fail. My hunch didn't necessarily have any basis, but, anxiety that I would never meet Bang Eunji unless I met her now rose within me.

So, I hid myself deeper in the vent, listening to the approaching footsteps. I felt uneasy and tried to crawl to a place light wouldn't reach, but I had few paths available to me.

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my god, Seo Dawon you dramatic idiot! He's utilizing the entire building to catch a hamster. I wonder if he's an…. interesting…. boss to work for. Or if this is more one-off because of our Hamster.

Also! Sorry for the slow update, but my updates will continue to be erratic this week! I'm vacationing in Portugal!!! (Azores Islands and then onto Lisbon!)

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Chapter 312

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The problem was, after one burrowed into the vents and reached a certain distance, the space in the middle narrowed and is blocked by what appeared to be a tight, mesh wire net; I could not go further inside.

I tried with all my might to unscrew the screw that held the wire mesh up with my hand, but it was tightened to the point that nothing short of an electric drill could do the job. So, I ended up wasting my strength futilely.

Meanwhile, the siege was steadily narrowing in on me. The voices of people and shining flashlights poking through the ventilation shafts grew gradually closer.

[Not here?]

[I can’t see it…]

[According to the design, they’re all connected internally. Hamsters are quite frightened in temperament, so I believe it’ll be somewhere in there?]

[Does anyone have the ‘Site’ skill?]

Some people even wanted to use their skills to find me.

‘Why are they all searching so hard?’

Even though this search and rescue operation was a direct order from Seo Dawon, I thought this was an excessive display of loyalty.

I curled up, squishing myself as close to the wire net as I could, and swallowed my discontent; nothing good would come of me voicing my displeasure right now. Meanwhile, the light of the flashlight almost reached my feet before passing me by; every time that happened, I was so nervous I couldn’t breathe properly.

Fortunately, the person behind the shining flashlight didn’t discover me at the end of the tunnel; the light soon retracted, and the searchers continued to move. I could hear their distant voices.

[I don’t think it’s there.]

[Honestly, though… How on earth are you supposed to find one hamster in such a large building? Maybe it already escaped outside…]

[Still, if we find it we’ll receive 100 million won.] [1]

“…What…?”

100 million won?

When I heard that the Mage had even offered a reward for my recovery, I was dumbfounded.

The Mage was probably certain that I had run away. Of course, though my acting had been a bit clumsy, I had succeeded. Because of that, within one hour, he had galvanized all these people to search for me; I felt a little ashamed.

No wonder… I had thought these unrelated people were working too hard to find a hamster…

“If I get caught, I’ll really be imprisoned for the rest of my life…”

I moved cautiously through another connected passage, feeling half appalled, half horrified. I was so nervous that my shoulders hurt from the tense muscles, but I couldn’t afford to complain. I continued to move to the right.

“This damn dress…”

The more I walked, the more unpleasant the rough texture of the skirt wrapped around my thighs became. Annoyed, I untied the frill fastened to my hair and threw it onto the ground.

The inside of the ventilation shaft was on the chillier side, but, because I kept moving in this escape attempt, sweat tumbled down my skin like rain.

“Huh?”

Then, suddenly, a savory, delicious scent came from the direction I was heading towards. It smelled so delicious, I couldn’t help but salivate.

“What’s that? Is that… Ramen?” I sniffed and followed the scent; through a hole underneath my feet, I looked into the room. When I saw the head full of colorful pink hair, I almost screamed automatically.

‘That’s Bang Eunji!’

I was made more joyous because this was an unexpected meeting.

‘Who knew I would find her this easily!’

I looked around as I thought of a way to approach her. I was near the room’s ceiling, so I needed a way to descend safely.

However, just as I looked around, Bang Eunji’s gaze focused directly on me.

“Huh……?”

[I found you.]

Startled, I couldn’t even blink my eyes; something shot out from behind her back–its speed was so fast, I could hardly make out the oncoming projectile.

I had no idea when she picked up her [Gunblade]. As soon as I heard her murmur, I felt as if the floor was collapsing beneath me. Dizziness welled up from within my body. Just when I recognized I was falling, I landed in Bang Eunji’s open hands.

“A…Aghh!”

[Jung Garam-chan! You shouldn’t make Guildmaster-nim sad, hm?]

Bang Eunji sternly frowned with her cute face at me who struggled and flapped about in my utter surprise. Of course, the grenadier’s cuteness did not take away from her intimidation.

‘…Just when and how did she catch me?’

Even though I was firmly in her grasp, I couldn’t help but stare at her in dumbfounded disbelief. However, Bang Eunji didn’t seem to care about my mood. She began rubbing and kneading at me; it felt as if my body would explode.

“W-What are you doing?!” Shocked, I screamed out at her. However, Bang Eunji’s relentless touch continued. She pressed at my stomach–not enough to hurt–and, shockingly, spread my legs apart.

“W-Wait! Wait! Wait!!!!!!!”

[Fortunately, he doesn’t seem hurt.]

“Damn it!! Bang Eunji! Get your hands off me! W-What are you looking at!” I tried to push her fingers away with all my might–I really wanted to die at this moment–but I couldn’t shake her off my open legs.

I didn’t even want to think about what on earth she was looking at; my face was already so red I was worried it might explode. At that moment, I really wanted to faint and never awake again.

Furthermore, this humiliation hadn’t come to an end: the door burst open and someone else came in.

Fortunately, it wasn’t Seo Dawon, but…

[Bang Eunji, did you find the cutie?]

[Yu~up. It’s very easy for Eunji!]

[Then, hand him over to me. Guildmaster-nim is waiting.]

Jo Chan-young appeared with a transparent hamster cage.

Of course, I was well aware of the fact that, except with Seo Dawon, I appeared to be a golden hamster to everyone.

However…

“That’s enough! Enough…! Let me go!”

I was not comforted by that knowledge.

In addition, Bang Eunji looked blatantly at Jo Chan-young as she held me, as if she had something to say. In other words, my underwear was still chillingly exposed underneath my lifted skirt as the two conversed.

Bang Eunji tilted her head–as she destroyed a man’s…no *_my_* dignity–as she responded in a cute tone:

[Eunji will personally hand him over to Guildmaster-nim herself.]

[Then, put him in this cage as you go.]

[Hmmm…?]

For some reason, tension rose between the two. I had already given up and covered my face with both arms. No matter how much strength I placed in my thighs, Bang Eunji's two fingers effortlessly splayed them wide open. I… couldn't resist anymore.

The moment I covered my face, Bang Eunji threw Jo Chan-young a seemingly nonchalant question.

[By the way… Why is there a weird skill cast on the cage?]

[……]

[That skill… As soon as Garam-chan is placed in that cage, he'll be transported elsewhere.]

[Tsk…]

Jo Chan-young, after hearing Bang Eunji's wary question, clicked his tongue and affirmed her suspicions.

I was surprised to hear his response and lowered the arm that covered my face, wondering what on earth was going on. I looked between the two guild members alternatingly.

Maybe Bang Eunji couldn't comprehend Jo Chan-young's behavior either; she placed my strength in her grip as she interrogated him.

[You're trying to take away Garam-kun, right? Why? Don't you want Guildmaster-nim's esteem?]

[No. I'm not interested in receiving Guildmaster-nim's favor.]

As he answered, Jo Chan-young's expression was tinged with rare anger. Bang Eunji also hesitated momentarily, surprised by that expression. Soon, she recovered her complexion and interrogated Jo Chan-young with an even sharper tone.

[Then, how will you explain that cage?]

[The Guildmaster doesn’t have the right to raise this cutie. After all, cutie escaped from him. So… I’ll raise him.]

Jo Chan-young replied openly, as if what he said was only natural. Bang Eunji snorted–

[Have you gone insane?]

[Our Guildmaster is the one that’s gone insane. Look at how fancily he’s decorated the hamster house. He didn’t even create a space for this guy to breathe or hide… The clothes that I’ve pointed out as abuse has become even more grotesque. I’m utterly disappointed.]

Jo Chan-young said as he stared at my captured self in Bang Eunji’s hands.

His expression when he talked to Bang Eunji was incredibly cold, but, the moment he met my eyes, his gaze gentled. He looked as if he pitied me.

‘Honestly, how much does that person love animals?’

He wanted to save me so much he’d willingly turn Bang Eunji and Seo Dawon into his enemy…

It was touching, but I felt a bit awkward since I wasn’t a real hamster. Meanwhile, Bang Eunji shouted at Jo Chan-young, as if she felt betrayed.

[Jo Chan-young-kun! This is mutiny!]

[I just want to save the cutie from this fucked up life.]

[What do you mean fucked up? I won’t hold back if you insult Guildmaster-nim anymore!]

[Once again I realize that all humans are fucked up equally. Bang Eunji… I hope you understand that if you intend to return this cutie back to his abuser, I will have no choice but to go all out.]

[Haahh? Does Jo Chan-young-kun think I’m an easy opponent?]

In response, Bang Eunji finally released me from her grasp. Of course, though, she kept me in her jacket pocket so I wouldn't run away… The mere change from my humiliating posture made me sigh in relief.

Jo Chan-young stared at me before raising both arms and bringing them together in a sharp clap. Immediately, his hands became feathered; his arms were turned into wings.

[…It seems you are serious.]

Bang Eunji stated; she grabbed the [Gunblade] that was mounted on her back with both hands before aiming forward. A palpable tension settled between the two guild members.

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my gosh he loves animals too much T_T My hearttt

Footnotes

1. That's 100,000 dollars. Seo Dawon adores the hamster O.o

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[**Panic Blade**!]

Bang Eunji rushed forward first. She rapidly swung her long [Gunblade] as if it were a long sword.

However, Jo Chan-young avoided all the attacks that came at him with a single jump. Perhaps due to his arms-turned-wings, once he jumped, he spent an incredibly long time in the air. In addition, his body continued to change. No longer just his arms, but his other body parts began to transform into those of a divine beast.

This was the first time I had seen Jo Chan-young's class skills this close up; I opened my eyes wide and observed the transformation.

Beneath Jo Chan-young's neck, he began to resemble a peacock with the colors of a phoenix, and his face gradually became covered with feathers. Soon, his transformation into one of the divine beasts, the phoenix, was complete. As a first-time viewer, the skill was unfamiliar to me, but the transformation was more beautiful than bizarre. It felt like I was watching an anime.

'This isn't the time to be calmly appreciating and thinking, but…'

I sighed deeply as I watched the close fight between the two guild members. Because the jacket pocket I was in hung close to her chest, I could feel her pounding heartbeat every time she moved ferociously.

Similarly, Jo Chan-young kept up with Bang Eunji with the intensity of his movements. Naturally, this office was becoming a real mess.

As soon as they began to fly around, I gripped the pocket as hard as I could. If I bounced away during this conflict, it'd be a total disaster–this time, I'd really die a dog's death. At the same time, I looked at Jo Chan-young who, unable to voice his complaints, relentlessly attacked Bang Eunji.

'Honestly… Jo Chan-young, you too. I'm in Bang Eunji's pocket right now. Is it all right to attack her–and by extension, me–like this?'

Contrary to his strong desire to save this hamster, my chances of survival were gradually decreasing.

However, the man was completely ignorant of my feelings; his attacks became more intense. Now, half of the office door had been blown away; the boundaries that distinguished the hallway from the office had no meaning anymore.

Even though his surroundings were demolished, Jo Chan-young didn't stop; instead, he glared at Bang Eunji with his now crimson eyes. An unusual amount of pressure poured forth from his gaze.

[No way…]

Perhaps she too felt the same unnatural atmosphere; Bang Eunji hurriedly widened the distance between them.

[**Fire Finish**!]

Almost simultaneously, Jo Chan-young spread his wings before flapping them forward.

Stiff, scarlet feathers began to fly out of his wings in front of him like a rain of arrows. Of course, Bang Eunji avoided every attack, but the feathers embedded into the environment after she dodged were not satisfied with the piercing damage they wrought and began to ignite everything they touched.

Whoosh– Crackle–

Naturally, the furniture burned and began to puff out smoke. The fire alarm was triggered immediately, and water burst out of the sprinklers.

I hid my face within the pocket in order to avoid the rain-like, pouring water. As expected, Bang Eunji was also flustered; annoyed, she shook off the water that dared to touch her head. She said–

[Are you really going to go this far?]

[I'm not joking.]

Bang Eunji stared at Jo Chan-young's stiff expression before sarcastically remarking–

[But, aren't you just wasting your time here?]

[……]

Certainly, I could hear the sound of footsteps getting louder as they headed our way, drawn by the fire alarm and these guys' noisy quarrel.

Jo Chan-young, who had yet to gain the upper hand while fighting against Bang Eunji, was likely to lose if another guild member who was bound to be cooperative to Seo Dawon's will joined.

He frowned, sighed deeply, and suddenly swung his wings in the air. For some reason, rather than using his skills, it seemed like…

'System message…?'

It felt like he was pressing buttons on the system's chat function? Bang Eunji also saw his actions and crossed her arms over her chest.

[Are you calling someone who'll take your side?]

[……]

Ignoring Bang Eunji's question, Jo Chan-young continued to wordlessly press at something midair with his wings. Then, afterwards, he flapped a few times before remaining still.

Meanwhile, the people that ran towards us stopped behind Jo Chan-young and tried to comprehend what had occurred. They surrounded the two guild members and shouted–

[W-What has happened here?]

[Jo Chan-young-kun has gone completely insane.]

[W-What?]

[He's complaining and claiming he'll take away Guildmaster-nim's hamster!]

The people that ran here looked at Jo Chan-young with uncertain expressions. It seemed that Jo Chan-young was well-regarded within the guild.

However, when the man remained silent and did not refute her words, the people looked back at Bang Eunji with awkward expressions on their faces.

[Excuse me, then the fire…]

[That's something Jo Chan-young-kun did as well!]

Bang Eunji stamped her feet, irate. She shouted–

[What are you all dawdling around for?]

[Th-That's…]

When Bang Eunji frowned fiercely, the hesitant people surrounded Jo Chan-young; though scared, it seemed they had found their resolve. They approached Jo Chan-young with nervous expressions and spoke to him–

[Excuse me, I think you'll first need to go with us to Guildmaster-nim and explain the situation.]

[……]

[Hehe~?]

It was then.

Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice from the half-broken ceiling; I looked up instinctively. My eyes met a grinning, cute face.

It was Jung Garam. Both Bang Eunji and I were surprised by his sudden appearance; her heart began to beat violently.

However, the words that popped out of Bang Eunji's mouth belied thoughts that were far from the surprise I knew she felt.

[Oh my. How small must you be to fit into such a place? Jung Garam-kun, you're…]

[Do you really want to die?]

Jung Garam instantly furrowed his brows. He rolled forward into a hanging position–not too dissimilar to a bat–before landing lightly in the office.

Coincidentally, he leaped right in front of Bang Eunji's nose. At that moment, her heart beat stronger than ever. She was far too aware of everyone's positions to be surprised; a passing thought forced my mouth wide open in surprise.

'No way, don't tell me… Bang Eunji…?'

However, that thought didn't last long–Jung Garam suddenly reached out and very casually took me from her jacket pocket.

Even though I was the subject of his attack, I couldn't respond because it happened so quickly. Similarly, Bang Eunji simply stood there, eyes wide

open, as she stared back at the young Assassin.

However, Bang Eunji soon came to her sense and shouted at Jung Garam–

[No…! What have you done!? That's my hamster!]

[Who told you to be so mesmerized by me.]

Jung Garam responded cheekily and stepped back to avoid Bang Eunji's approach. Her face was completely red. She was definitely angry, but she looked somewhat embarrassed as well.

After observing the pink-haired girl's expression, I turned to Jung Garam. However, unlike her embarrassed countenance, Jung Garam's expression looked tranquil…and also a bit bored.

Jung Garam did not hesitate anymore and walked up to Jo Chan-young's side, holding me in his hands.

[Now, is this good enough?]

[…Thanks.]

[Then, I've settled my debts with this?]

[Yeah.]

Jung Garam handed me over to Jo Chan-young as they conversed– though the exact topic was difficult to parse.

Jo Chan-young returned to his human form before embracing me safely with both hands. Staring at the two from within the man's palms, I realized that Jo Chan-young must have chatted with Jung Garam earlier, midair, during his fight.

Bang Eunji screamed hysterically from behind–

[Stupid! Dwarf! Traitor! Guildmaster-nim told us to bring him that hamster! What are we supposed to do if you just hand him over?! Are you truly an idiot, Jung Garam-kun??]

[……]

[I'm going to tell Guildmaster-nim everything that happened here!]

Jung Garam looked at her with a strangely playful look as if he were barely listening to her criticisms.

However, there was no warmth in that gaze–merely cold observation, like a cat contemplating how he should catch and cook a mouse. I wrapped my arms around my trembling shoulders instinctively as I sharply avoided his eyes.

Following that, Jung Garam looked at my frightened self before smiling.

[Hmmm…. but Dawon-hyung told me to bring back a 'hamster.']

[What are you saying?]

Bang Eunji asked, unable to understand. As soon as I heard Jung Garam's words, though, I raised my head. Can the young Assassin see my true form?

"W-Wait…!"

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I wanna know what debts Jung Garam had with Jo Chan-young.

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I hurriedly shouted at Jung Garam, “What do I look like to you? G-Garam-ah! Can you hear me? You hear me, right?”

[……]

“If you can hear me, please take me back to Bang Eunji-ssi!”

[Haah…?]

Jung Garam looked at me with a strange expression on his face…as if he never imagined I would speak to him.

However, I wasn’t in a position to hide or be crafty. It’d be better to be with Seo Dawon–if I left with Jo Chan-young, I’d forever be raised as a hamster. The fear of living life as a pet underneath Jo Chan-young’s surveillance overwhelmed me.

However, Jung Garam neither helped nor did he completely turn a blind eye to my struggles; he merely continued to observe me. The wariness in his eyes reminded me of Seo Dawon a week ago…

‘He’s suspicious of my identity…’

In the end, I determined that I wouldn’t be able to receive Garam-ie’s cooperation immediately. So, I bit Jo Chan-young’s hand as hard as I could when he tried to place me in the cage.

[Cutie?]

“I said, it’s Choi Lee-kyung!”

Of course, my teeth didn’t pierce Jo Chan-young’s skin. However, he hesitated for a moment, as if he didn’t expect my desperate rebellion. Thanks to that, I escaped through a gap between his hand and the cage’s lid, slipping from the man’s grasp.

Jo Chan-young quickly tried to grab me, but I was able to slide down his sleeve, missing his fingers by the skin of my teeth.

When I landed on his shoes, he flinched and stepped back. He must have been afraid to step on me, so he retreated instinctively.

I didn’t miss that opportunity; I quickly crawled underneath the desk next to Jo Chan-young’s shoes. The fire-suppression sand and water–spread throughout the room after the sprinklers were triggered-clung to my body, but I knew I needed to hold out and endure in this small gap.

Fortunately, I made the correct choice. When I disappeared underneath the desk, I heard Jo Chan-young’s flustered voice.

However, suddenly, a big hand stroked my head. Jo Chan-young, kneeling on the drenched floor, placed his hand into the gap underneath the desk.

I froze–my hips stiffened–I didn’t know he’d try this hard. I met his worried, anxious eyes; he began to talk to me in an apologetic voice when I quickly backed away.

[Cutie, you were scared, weren’t you? <3] [1]

“What the…!” I stared at Jo Chan-young; goosebumps raised all over my arms at his voice. Though I knew he could only see a golden hamster when he looked at me… But…. Still…

‘His character is just too different!’

How could his personality change so much from interacting with people compared to animals?

Above all, Jo Chan-young's affectionate love towards animals did not suit me. Even if I wanted to use him and that affection, Jo Chan-young would only see me as a golden hamster. Even though he was obsessed with me, he'd still treat me like a hamster…

Furthermore, Jo Chan-young's 'good intentions' were the biggest obstacle in the [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

Though Jo Chan-young was sure to treat animals well, he would be a likely cause for a bad ending. In my perspective, Seo Dawon, who treated me like a human, was at least a little bit better.

I instinctively stepped back to avoid Jo Chan-young's touch, recalling the deluge of sunflower seeds that Bang Eunji poured into my cage in the past.

Jo Chan-young's expression became even more fretful. He furrowed his brows as he sat closer to the desk.

However, he didn't try to touch me again; he tried to check my condition by sticking his face close to the gap to visually confirm my health. Additionally, his imagination brewed up stories that may explain my escape.

[Are you perhaps scared because Guildmaster-nim bullied you?]

"…What?"

[I'm not going to do anything our Cutie would dislike.]

"…Do you think I'm pleased with anything you're doing right now?!"

[Baby, come this way. Hm? Don't eat the dirty stuff on the floor. It's yucky, yucky.] [2]

"Haah…"

As expected, it would be futile to go with Jo Chan-young. My butt clenched tight, I was alert and nervous, keeping an eye on his movements.

However, Jo Chan-young wasn't the only person in this office. I felt wind suddenly blowing from behind me; when I ducked my head reflexively, I saw a thin hand miss me by a narrow margin. Colorful, flashy nails on the moving hand passed by.

"B-Bang Eunji?! Are you crazy? I almost died!"

[Tsk! I missed him!]

Before I knew it, Bang Eunji sat on my other side and tried to grab me. Her movements were so rough, though, that I felt my bones would be crushed if she grabbed me incorrectly.

When I saw her blazing eyes, my hands and feet stiffened. It seemed to me that she was more resentful at Jo Chan-young and Jung Garam taking her hamster than she was worried about losing me.

Maybe that's why I felt neither caution nor care in her movements. The sound of the wind caused by every swing of her hand made my spine shiver.

'Still… I suppose I have to go towards her?'

No matter how scary she was, this [Vengeful Ghost Memory]'s goal involved persuading Bang Eunji. Therefore, with a frown on my face, I walked towards her hand.

However, for some reason, Bang Eunji quickly pulled away her hand; following that, I heard a terrible noise from her direction.

I stopped walking towards her. Soon, the earth seemed to roar; I flopped back on my behind, ears ringing.

[Attacking me shamelessly from behind?! Are you really going to continue acting this way, Jung Garam?]

[…I told you that I'd buy you a new hamster–similar to that one.]

[Guildmaster-nim wants *_that_* hamster though!!!]

[Hey, look here…Jung Garam. I'm warning you–don't buy the Guildmaster any more hamsters. I'm against that.]

They began fighting amongst themselves.

Jo Chan-young and Jung Garam, though it seemed like they were in an alliance, raised their voices gradually; once again, tension settled in the office's atmosphere.

[Let's take the easy route, okay, easy route. Let's just throw her something else.]

Jung Garam shot back at Jo Chan-young, tone indicating his growing annoyance. And Jung Garam's insensitive words touched on the animal-lover's delicate nerves.

[Do you think an animal is some fucking toy?]

Jo Chan-young's voice became spookily gloomy; the air felt cold. Instead of replying, the young Assassin clicked his tongue, as if he found his fellow guildmate a bit pathetic.

And…

[Eunji bought that hamster for 12 million won!]

Bang Eunji cared little for their moral conflict and claimed ownership over me. Jo Chan-young immediately rebuked her in a contemptuous tone–

[Disgusting… What's the point of bragging about buying–high prices at that–from a pet shop…]

[I said I'd give you 12 million won. Why can't you understand?]

Furthermore, Jung Garam joined in on rebuking her. The three continued their fight, though it seemed more like three separate monologues rather than a continuous conversation.

However…

[The only thing Eunji wants is Garam-chan!]

Angered, Bang Eunji screamed loudly. Then, she sucked in a breath, as if she were embarrassed.

At first, I wondered what she even said, but then I belatedly recalled the name she gave me.

[What?]

Jung Garam, who was ignorant of all that, asked in a dumbfounded tone. However, Bang Eunji remained quiet.

[Hey, what kind of bullshit did you say?]

Of course, Jung Garam didn't let this situation go and continued to interrogate her. Bang Eunji must have been incredibly embarrassed. Quite unlike her, she mumbled quietly–

[I-I just gave him that name because he's so small. There are no other reasons…]

Listening to her excuses, my previous hypothesis only strengthened. However, Jung Garam continued to be ignorant of Bang Eunji's innermost thoughts; he asked again, bewildered–

[What? You gave that hamster my name?]

[S-So? What are you going to do about it?]

[His name is… No, fuck. Why would you give someone else's name to something like that? Gross.]

Bang Eunji said nothing, a brief pause, before quickly replying to him in a sharp tone–

[…Isn't it grosser that you're still 160 cm tall at your age?]

[You really want to die, huh?]

As I watched the war of words between the two young guild members, I muttered, “No way… Does Bang Eunji… like Jung Garam?”

[What?]

And, Jung Garam was the one to answer me.

Become a Patron!

TL: NGL, If I was Choi Lee-kyung, I’d start to look for some popcorn to eat while watching this soap opera. To think: She liked Garam and not Seo Dawon! (I can’t blame her, I adore Garam too).

Also Jo Chan-young: Don’t shop, adopt

Tbh, though, is it even possible to adopt a hamster? From what I know, most people shop bc hamsters aren’t really a thing in most shelters?

Footnotes

1. He’s speaking in a cute uwu tone that one might use towards their pets. There’s no heart in the original, I just wanted to denote that he sounds cute.
2. Jo Chan-young is actually saying the stuff on the floor is (jiji) which is ‘trash’ or ‘gross’ in baby-speak. To adapt it to English, I said it was ‘yucky,’ which is something a toddler might say about trash.

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Chapter 315

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[Bang Eunji likes me?]

Flick–!

When Jung Garam muttered, voice laden with disbelief, I suddenly heard the sound of finger flicking.

I looked around, frowning at the loud ringing sound in my ears. Strangely, though, after the sound, the room became quiet as if no one else was around.

“W-What…?”

I tried to hold my breath and carefully look out from under the desk to observe my surroundings. Something must have happened.

I looked out with only my head sticking out; someone grabbed my skirt from behind and snatched me up quickly. Startled, I struggled and cried out, “W-Who is this?!”

[…Hmm.]

The person who had lifted me turned me around and made me look into their face.

Soon, my view filled with pink hair and cold, blue eyes–almost as if she wore colored lenses. It was ‘Bang Eunji.’

“…Bang Eunji? Oh! W-Wait!”

[……]

Bang Eunji did not respond to my cries, but she reacted differently than before. She blinked at me, eyes fixed on my face, as if she could finally understand my words.

And soon, her body began to melt and flow, becoming like liquid; she turned into a giant jelly.

Of course, I was still stuck in that…thing… But, I didn’t feel too alarmed nor were my crisis senses triggered. I had already experienced this phenomenon.

‘…The real [Bang Eunji] will appear soon.’

This space manifests when the real owner of this interdimensional plane–the targeted contractor–appears at the end of the [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

I watched the crumbling jelly lump with anticipation. As expected, the mushy chunks amalgamated together to become a glossy pink cat.

Excited and afraid, I looked up at the vertical slits–the cat’s pupils–and opened my mouth, “Bang Eunji…!”

[….What is your identity?]

She felt somewhat subdued, as if she had been aroused from a deep, long slumber.

I felt vigilance, feeble curiosity, and deep resignation in Bang Eunji. I wondered why she felt that way, but I was able to calm myself and speak to her in a stable voice, drawing upon my experience from dealing with the

various [Vengeful Ghost Memories.] “My name is Choi Lee-kyung, and… My class is Necromancer. I’m here to sign a contract with you.”

[…Necromancer?]

Bang Eunji’s answering question showed no trace of mockery nor did she seem like she was particularly confused. She merely peered down at the top of my head, impassive.

First, I took out the contract I had made with Seo Dawon and showed it to her; she remained silent. Then, I continued to explain calmly, “If you sign a contract with me, you’ll be able to influence the world again as my Servant.”

[……]

“Don’t you want to… get your revenge on the traitors?”

[I want to.]

Contrary to her immediate answer, Bang Eunji’s attitude seemed too casual and nonchalant for her to be immersed in vengeance.

It was different from her hiding her agitation to keep a calm countenance; a sense of weakness and fragility surrounded her like a weighty fog, as if nothing was left in her and she was completely exhausted. Like…a person who accepted death.

‘…No way, has she given up?’

I was flustered by her unexpected attitude, but, fortunately, Bang Eunji was still reading the [Vengeful Ghost Contract] Seo Dawon had crafted. I was a little reassured by that–she wouldn’t be reading if she wasn’t interested at all.

However, Bang Eunji remained silent for a long while even after reading the contract. Licking her soft, fuzzy arms with her tongue, she met my nervous gaze.

“You’re not… going to *not* sign the contract, right?”

[……]

She still did not answer my follow-up question.

Anxious, I squeezed my way between her furry cat paws and held her paws tightly. I wanted to say anything that could attract her attention.

The first person that passed through my mind was Seo Dawon:

“Seo Dawon needs you, too.”

[I suppose… Guildmaster-nim needs me.]

Bang Eunji answered, her eyes slowly blinking. However, she ended with just that sentence.

I looked up at Bang Eunji, shocked by her unexpected attitude. Without Seo Dawon, would she just resign herself and perish? However, regardless of my internal conflict, she suddenly asked some questions of her own.

[Have you ever wanted something but had no idea how to get it?]

“What?”

[Have you ever liked someone who would never like you back?]

“……!”

I looked into Bang Eunji’s dim, blue eyes. For the first time ever, she laughed when she saw my wide-open mouth. However, that laughter dissipated into more emptiness without much substance to fuel her humor.

[Haha…]

“Wait. Then, you…”

[Eunji was curious up until she was beheaded. Jung Garam…]

"……"

[What became of him?]

"……"

[Well… He probably died. He had a lot of enemies after all…]

"……"

[Sometimes, Eunji wanted to strangle him.]

As she said that, Bang Eunji stretched out her arms, head still bowed.

Only then did I safely step foot onto the ground near her, but my heart was dragged into an even deeper quagmire. So, Bang Eunji liked Jung Garam–how unbelievable. But, Jung Garam…

"Garam-ie…doesn't seem to have a clue about your feelings?" Since he always called her a nutcase of a woman, I felt I had no choice but to bring this point up.

Bang Eunji replied with a smirk on her face–

[Not just Jung Garam–Eunji bet no one else knew? No one was concerned about Eunji's matters.]

"What? B-But…" I was surprised by Bang Eunji's cynical remarks and tried to refute them. However, she continued, repeating that lonely statement: 'No one was interested in me.'

[At first, Eunji had no interest in guys like him either.]

"……"

[But, even if my interest grew… Jung Garam didn't respond to anything except teasing. Stuff like 'You're annoying, so piss off.' Eunji wanted to be nice to him at first, too.]

"……"

[There's no mistake–that guy must be a psychopath.]

"……"

[No matter how well Eunji treated him, he never acknowledged me.]

After placing her chin in her palm, Bang Eunji asked for validation from me–

[Wasn't I good to you at first, too?]

"…Huh?"

[Who would spend so much money on a hamster, after all? I bought you a house, dressed you in pretty clothes… All the sunflower seeds I gave to Necromancer-ssi were organic as well.]

"Ah…Mmmn…. Th-Thanks."

My vision felt like it was going dark from shock when I heard her refer to her one-sided behavior as some childish and self-centered show of affection from her. I thought it wouldn't be unreasonable for Garam-ie to be completely clueless about Bang Eunji's intentions.

However, I couldn't say that, so I opened my mouth to appease her, "B-But… Perhaps… Do you know what Garam-ie likes?"

[Well… He pretends otherwise, but he enjoys torture and murder."

"What? Ah, yeah…"

Of course, I knew Jung Garam had such tendencies, but I received fresh, new shocks when I heard such words tumbling out of her cute lips.

Then, because that wasn't the answer I was searching for, I narrowed down the scope of my question. "That… Other than murder. Should I say… material items…? Do you know what he prefers?"

[Yes. He picks out most of the vegetables in his food, so he prefers meat. Also, he doesn’t drink cola very often. Rather than pork, he’s a beef-stan; he prefers caramel over gum as well… Eunji also knows he collects Aeonz Neon figures. He had a hard time finding the 2007 edition collection, but, when he heard that I had gotten to them first, he broke into my house and stole them! That fool…! Eunji was going to give those figures to him on his birthday, but, after he acted like a thief, I sent him high-heel shoes instead.]

Become a Patron!

TL: Oh my god. I just have no words. I just need to share the popcorn w/ Lee-kyung.

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Chapter 316

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Bang Eunji murmured as if she were angry, but her voice, talking about her entangled past with Jung Garam, was the brightest it had ever been. I wondered what I should say but, in the end, continued to listen to her quietly.

[Eunji has no idea what he's thinking. Sometimes, he tries to place living monsters in his inventory…?]

"……"

[Isn't that totally weird? Do you think he tries to make conversations with those monsters, squirreled away in a training room somewhere?… He's like a kid. Of course, he looks like one, too.]

She spoke as if she found him pathetic, but Bang Eunji seemed to have no idea what expression she was making at the moment.

Even though her current form was a cat, her eyes twinkled; her nose scrunched repeatedly, as if she were ticklish. Wanting to understand the mysterious and incomprehensible mind of her beloved…Despite accusing him of being a fool, she couldn't tear her eyes away from his face, gazing at him with an innocent expression.

Bang Eunji truly liked Jung Garam. However, her methods to show her love were so tailored to her perspective that it was easy for a free-spirited person like Jung Garam to misunderstand her interest as malicious teasing.

After thinking about what to say, I swallowed my saliva and cautiously pushed my luck, “But… Garam-ie… Doesn’t like it when you mock his height…?”

Bang Eunji, who had been licking her paw pads, raised her head and looked at me.

[…And?]

“So… Hmm. Well, if you compliment him without teasing him, I don’t think he’ll ignore you or say harsh things to you…”

[He ignores me even if Eunji treats him well, though?]

“R-Really?”

[Jung Garam has been called a genius ever since he was young, and there are more than a few people that gather around him, plying flatteries in order to raise their esteem in his eyes. That man isn’t interested in compliments…]

“Hmmm…”

[Eunji would rather be hated. At least, then, he can’t ignore me–ignore me when we’re in the same space.]

Bang Eunji spoke coldly before soon drooping as if she lost all energy. She languidly stretched out her front feet again, blinking slowly. It felt like she was spacing out after expressing the intense emotions within her… Anyways, I was worried–she looked too weak and despondent for someone her age.

‘But… though I feel a little sorry for her, Bang Eunji is too egocentric. Personality-wise, she doesn’t fit with Garam-ie…’

No matter how much I racked my brain, her self-righteousness was a bigger obstacle to a possible relationship between the two than Jung Garam himself.

I recalled when I first met with Jung Garam in his [Vengeful Ghost Memory]. When I acknowledged the things he worked hard to achieve… For example, when I recognized the value of one of his titles and praised it, the young Assassin was delighted. His affection rose significantly. That sort of attitude worked on Jung Garam afterwards as well.

If she acted sour to Jung Garam every single time they interacted, would he be wary of the times she did praise him? Perhaps he thought she was being sarcastic and that she didn't value his accomplishments.

Moreover, Bang Eunji was stalking another man. Most people wouldn't think she liked Jung Garam because of that.

Recalling her attitude throughout the [Vengeful Ghost Memory], I cautiously asked, "Excuse me… Then, you don't like Seo Dawon in the romantic sense?"

The pink cat snorted, but, fortunately, she answered without behaving too grumpily.

[Guildmaster-nim is my favorite.]

"…Favorite?"

[Just… Isn't he a perfect human being?]

"Hmm… I-Is that so?"

[Also, there are times when he knows what Eunji is thinking better than Eunji herself…]

When I looked into her blue eyes as she spoke, I felt yearning and respect meshing together in her expression. It appeared that her romantic affection and her stalking were separate. I became relieved for some reason, and exclaimed, "Aha…"

[So, I depend on him in various ways.]

As I listened to her, I carefully voiced my opinion, “B-But… For those that don’t know your intentions well, Eunji, you… look like you like Seo Dawon.”

[I like him. He’s my favorite in the whole wide world?]

Again, she didn’t seem to understand what I meant and answered immediately. Trying to make her understand, I slowly explained, “No, I mean… Should I say that, others are misunderstanding you? Rather than Jung Garam… Basically, it looks like you want to date Seo Dawon.”

[Who would think that?]

I heard a half-flustered, half-angry counter-question from above. Bang Eunji, grumbling, bared her sharp teeth as if she would rip apart the person that would ever claim that she wanted to date her Guildmaster. Her tail was completely fluffed up.

Panicked by her agitation, I hurriedly waved my hand in front of me and said, “Just, you know. People usually….believe only what they can see.”

[Unbelievable. Eunji likes Jung Garam, and she only wants to be adored and doted upon by Guildmaster-nim!]

“R-Right… But, hm…. Garam-ie is probably confused as well. He only sees you brusquely mocking his height daily, while that same girl would praise Seo Dawon kindly and place him on a pedestal…”

[……]

“He might wonder if you like Seo Dawon more than him… And then… Wouldn’t it be logical that your affections and interest wouldn’t reach him?”

[Ah.]

Bang Eunji lowered her head as if she understood what I was saying. There was a tinge of disappointment in her movements.

However, she began speaking angrily again–

[Is Jung Garam-kun a fool?! I like Guildmaster-nim, but I wouldn't want to date him at all. He's not interested in Eunji that way either! And, he'd notice that if he only paid a little attention. As expected, Jung Garam is a fool, a psychopath with Peter Pan syndrome, dwarf, dumpy idiot who isn't interested in me! Stupid!]

"W-Well…"

[Whenever Eunji even looks at him, he always says, 'What are you staring at?' and is always so crude to me. And Eunji hadn't even teased him first during those times! He always ignored me and bullied me, acting like Eunji wasn't there! He always harassed Eunji first! Eunji was going to give Garam-kun a present to celebrate his birthday, but Garam-kun has no idea when my birthday is…! Eunji wouldn't be so disappointed if he was like Woo Ragi-ssi who was a despicable person that never remembered nor celebrated anyone's birthday. But, he always gives a lot of presents on other people's birthdays… Just not on mine…]

Bang Eunji's pretty blue eyes soon began to water.

I panicked and dithered, worried she'd start crying, but the tears did not flow from her eyes. However, Bang Eunji stared resolutely somewhere else in the air, as if she were resentful.

Blink– Blink– With every blink, her chest swelled and deflated slowly, as if she were trying to calm down. Staring at her, I felt that for someone so obstinately lost in her own world, she had incredibly high self-confidence as well.

People with such firm egos could not easily lower themselves to another's level. Therefore, no matter how much she liked Jung Garam, she probably could not have expressed her love in a 'normal way.' As a result, the two kept arguing as if they were bitter rivals.

'Seo Dawon…Did he know about this?'

I suddenly thought of the Mage, but I soon shook my head to clear those thoughts. What was important now was to relieve Bang Eunji's frustration and anger and to entice her into signing a contract with me.

However, I couldn't promise that Jung Garam would return her feelings and hand her his heart; I looked up at the cat hopelessly. I thought about what I should say carefully before grabbing her front paw, shaking it cautiously.

Bang Eunji looked down at me with those still tearful eyes. Without avoiding her gaze, I spoke bluntly, "Eunji-yah… But, don't you still want to see Jung Garam again?"

[…Is Jung Garam really dead as well? Eunji thought he might have been able to run away.]

"He's dead, but…he's signed a contract with me and has been half-revived."

As soon as I finished speaking, the tears began to drop from the corners of Bang Eunji's eyes. She wasn't yet aware of her tears that had burst forward like a now-free stream that had been stymied by a levee.

[Still… I'm glad he's been resurrected…]

Though she mumbled a bit absently, her smile was definitely affectionate. The sight made my heart ache–I couldn't be too compassionate to her plight, and I needed to respect Jung Garam's emotions as well. I should have remained neutral in their conflict, but…

"…Eunji-yah, You… If you sign a contract with me, you can meet with Jung Garam again."

[……]

"And, if you're truly revived… I'll help you." The words tumbled automatically out of my mouth.

TL: Honestly, I kinda feel for Bang Eunji here. And I’m glad she has Choi Lee-kyung on her side…? ish?

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Chapter 317

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However, Bang Eunji merely stared blatantly at me. Her gaze was laden with clear mistrust.

“W-What’s with that expression…”

When I resolved myself and declared something so big yet was met with such an expression, the complaints automatically tumbled out of my mouth. However, Bang Eunji simply stared at me with her thin pupils and said in an aloof tone–

[But… Necromancer-ssi. You don’t look very popular.]

“W-What?!”

I was angered by her words, which honestly hit the nail on the head. However, regardless of my reaction, Bang Eunji continued.

[Other than Jung Garam, at least Eunji received lots of confessions from other guys.]

Then, she suddenly licked my face with her sandpaper tongue.

I stuttered, unable to speak properly after the sudden attack.

However, Bang Eunji licked my hair a few times with her tongue– revealing my face by fully slicking back my bangs–before carefully looking

at my forehead and the features below it. I couldn’t dare move and stood motionless before her observant gaze.

We stood, looking at each other, for a long time…

[Tsk.]

She made a mysterious noise and, as if she had lost interest, buried her face in her arms.

Eventually, I ran towards Bang Eunji and began pummeling her front paws with my fists. “Bang Eunji! What does that mean!?!”

She looked up reluctantly and sighed deeply. Her nostrils flared against my wet bangs.

[Necromancer… ssi doesn’t look like he’s particularly popular.]

“What?!”

[It doesn’t mean you’re ugly, so please calm down. In any case… Eunji doesn’t think you’ll be of much help.]

She really just said all she had to say.

This time, I was rendered speechless. I knew that Bang Eunji said what she said objectively, with no other intention than to be honest, but that didn’t lessen the hurt I received.

Rather, in a way, it hurt even more as she spoke without much emotion fueling her words. Unwittingly, I shouted, “I’m… Despite that, I’m dating someone I like!”

My expectations were subverted once again–Bang Eunji listened to those words with wide-open eyes, as if she were flabbergasted by those words.

[Eunji has also dated someone she liked.]

“Huh…?”

[That’s to be expected. After all, how old is Eunji?]

“……”

[Jung Garam is Eunji’s 20th love.]

She raised her blue eyes and looked down at me–

[No way–is this Necromancer-ssi’s first relationship?]

“……”

[Hmmm… But you look older than Eunji?]

She began muttering to herself.

However, just as she was curious about me, I was also curious about her.

Honestly, how old is she for Jung Garam to be her 20th love? If I’m being generous, she should be, at most, 20 years old…

I began nitpicking at her words, dumbfounded, “If Jung Garam is your 20th… When on earth was your first relationship?”

[Of course, it was when I was in daycare. But, elementary school was when Eunji first confessed and entered into a relationship.]

“……”

[Eunji was always popular.]

Eunji said this as if it were all common knowledge. Everything sounded absurd, but, at the same time, I recalled her original appearance. She wasn’t an easy person to approach, but…

‘As much as I loathe to say it… Her face is seriously adorable. Damn.’

I didn’t think she was bluffing when she was talking about her previous relationships or her confessions.

In the end, I, the ‘unpopular man,’ was the only one who took a hit to my pride. As she stated, I was always unpopular, and it was a miracle that I was dating Seo Dawon right now.

However, there was a bigger issue than my hurt pride–Bang Eunji was distrustful of me and I couldn’t attract her interest.

If Bang Eunji’s relationship with Jung Garam had no chance of improving, she probably wouldn’t actively engage in the Vengeful Ghost contract.

Even now, Bang Eunji was immersed in her own thoughts and was no longer looking at me. I felt nervous as I stared at her closed eyes.

‘If I don’t attract her attention now… I might fail a contract for the first time.’

That thought made me suddenly open my lips. “Bang Eunji…”

[……?]

“I… You’re right in that I’m not particularly popular, but…”

[Ye~es.]

“…You’d be surprised to know who I’m dating now.”

[???]

Bang Eunji looked at me with one eyebrow raised. I tried to ignore her scorching gaze… I steeled my resolve and shouted, “I-I… succeeded in seducing S-Seo Dawon!”

[…What did you say?]

After I spat out those words, I felt incredibly embarrassed and wanted to die on the spot.

However, as I expected, Bang Eunji jumped to her feet and looked at me, throwing away her weary, energy-lacking aura.

Deeper mistrust settled into her pupils. I almost choked up again, worried that my thoughts were transparent on my face. Anyways, I comforted myself with the fact that my words were half-truth.

'This is Bang Eunji's contract space, so there's no one else to nitpick at my words. Let's calm down.'

At that moment, Bang Eunji couldn't endure and shouted back–

[Lies! What are you even saying?! Guildmaster-nim likes women!]

After finishing my mind-control-mental-exercises, I answered nonchalantly, "That's what I'm saying–I can seduce a man who's only liked women before… I'm that c-capable."

Of course, I still wanted to die as soon as I spoke.

Staring at my reddened face, she immediately refuted–

[You just stuttered right now, though?]

"…If you keep attacking me like that, I won't tell you how I seduced him."

[……]

Amusingly, though Bang Eunji's lips kept voicing her disbelief, her eyes were sparkling.

Normally, those who hear something unbelievable will show that disbelief in their expressions as they focus on picking apart the words; however, Bang Eunji, though she did look as if she could hardly believe me, was fascinated by the very mention of the Mage.

In any case, I tried to appear confident by standing tall, raising my chin, and crossing my arms over my chest. “First… Regarding you and Jung Garam. I think the problem is that Jung Garam doesn’t even view you as a woman.”

[That’s because Jung Garam-kun is stupid.]

“…I understand your resentment… But, honestly, if I were Jung Garam, I wouldn’t know about your affection for me–the possibility wouldn’t even enter my dreams… I’m not trying to take sides here, though.”

[……]

Actually, this was the most important point I had determined from her earlier story. Bang Eunji’s kindness was just too one-sided, and her actions did not take into consideration the embarrassment or confusion that her object of affection was sure to experience.

Her bulldozer-like affection may suit some people and comfort them, but, judging by the time I had spent with Jung Garam, I was sure her method wouldn’t work on him. Furthermore, Bang Eunji was sure to have already realized that something about her methods was ineffective.

‘I’m sure she’s realized, but, as she’s always acted a certain way, she can’t easily change herself.’

Both Jung Garam and Bang Eunji had high pride and did not easily bend for others.

Even when Eunji tried to reconcile, Jung Garam probably made sure not to miss the opportunity to make fun of her. For some reason, I could vividly imagine Jung Garam giggling as he rejected her flirts or advances.

[Didn’t Eunji say that dwarf has no idea when Eunji is being kind to him?]

As expected, Bang Eunji protested as if she had been bitterly wronged. The momentum had clearly swung in my favor.

I answered her slowly and clearly, as if I were teaching basic Korean letters to a young child. “…From now on, insulting Garam using words like ‘Dwarf’ is prohibited.”

[What?]

“Garam-ie would rather be cursed at; he’s sensitive about his height… You should know that better than me.”

[……]

“If you keep teasing him using his height, even if you confess, he’ll take it as a joke or will never accept your feelings.”

[……]

Bang Eunji opened her mouth slightly as if she had something to say. After a long exhale which shook her whiskers, she began kneading at the ground ahead of her.

She wriggled like that for a long while, as if she had a lot to complain about. Then, with a long sigh, she nodded.

[…I’ll consider that.]

Her answer was a bit vague, but her expression looked more sincere than before. I spoke more decisively, trying to encourage their reconciliation. “That’s honestly the most important thing… It’ll already be much better if you properly call Garam-ie by his name.”

Bang Eunji merely stared blatantly at me without nodding. Then, in a rather provocative tone, she said–

[Aside from this matter.]

“Huh?”

[You said you seduced Guildmaster-nim–show me the evidence.]

“What?”

[I want to know how Necromancer-ssi seduced him.]

After saying that, the pink cat returned to her Bang Eunji form. I was shocked to see her human eyes and realized that she was being serious.

So, I yelled at her hurriedly, “What? No–wait a minute. I didn’t seduce Seo Dawon, ‘here….!'”

However, I couldn’t speak fast enough. Bang Eunji quickly snatched me away with one hand, and the mysterious space returned to a familiar location accompanied by a snapping noise.

Jo Chan-young and Jung Garam, whose figures had become dim while Bang Eunji and I were conversing, appeared in full glory once more.

TL: We’re back in! Don’t worry guys; there are plenty of revelations to be had about what Vengeful Ghost Memories are…As far as memories are concerned, this one is pretty plot relevant.

Also, it may be just me, but ever since I’ve gotten a cat I’ve become more partial to kitties. I just want to pet Bang Eunji’s pink head. That thing about her first relationship being in daycare though, lmao, that’s exactly something a bratty younger sister would say.

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Chapter 318

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[What the?]

[What…]

Shortly after the two appeared, they began to look around with puzzled expressions. They seemed to notice that something was off, but they frowned as if they couldn’t figure out what the problem was exactly.

Then, Jung Garam and Jo Chan-young suddenly met my eyes–from where I stood on the floor–at almost the same exact time.

[Ara? Was that… a hamster?]

[Cutie!]

After the two spoke, they stared at each other. Only then did I realize that this wasn’t the time to stand there, dumbfounded, and retreated immediately. My body acted on instinct.

‘Damn… And where did Bang Eunji go?’

After commenting that she wanted to see how I seduced Seo Dawon, she was nowhere to be found. It was just me and the two others in this room.

Furthermore, the two weren't even questioning their fellow guildmate's disappearance…

[Wait a minute, Cutie… Let's just sit still, hm? Uwuwuwu?]

[Agh, so annoying.]

The animal lover reached his hand out to me immediately.

'If I get caught here…!'

In the end, I couldn't continue to sit and think and instead focused on running away. Regardless of the matter with Bang Eunji, I first decided that I shouldn't be caught by those two. I needed to go and find Bang Eunji or meet Seo Dawon immediately.

So I tried to rush under the desk–my previous tactic; suddenly, white sneakers appeared in my escape direction. I couldn't stop my momentum as the shoe's appearance was too sudden, and I banged my head onto the hard leather.

Goosebumps rose on my skin as a tremendous strength gripped my body and lifted it up. I closed my eyes and screamed, "Ahhhhh!"

[Oh, got you.]

"I-I thought I was going to die! Jung Garam!!"

Jung Garam's smiling face, ignorant of my feelings, was just so angering…

However, the young assassin, who had noticed my human identity before Bang Eunji disappeared, did not react as he had earlier; it didn't seem as if he could hear my cries. Embarrassed, I realized that Jung Garam didn't even try to observe me carefully or listen to my baleful lament.

"What… Y-You can't understand me now?"

[Hyung, here.]

My hypothesis must have been accurate–Jung Garam ignored my shouts and handed me over to Jo Chan-young who reached out with his hands, ready to receive me.

The young assassin acted so naturally; he couldn't be deliberately disregarding me. I had to accept that the conditions of this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] had been changed. This time, it seemed as if Bang Eunji intended to observe without showing herself. Well, I understood up to this point, but…

"I-I'm going to vomit!" My head felt dizzy as I shook in the air, jostled by Jung Garam's hands. Furthermore, I worried that I would be locked into the cage that Jo Chan-young brought with him.

As a last-ditch effort, I bit Jung Garam's finger with all my might, but Jung Garam merely pressed down on my head with another finger without showing any outward signs of pain.

I had no choice but to stop biting in order to wriggle about and avoid the Assassin's finger. Eventually… I was turned into a flat disk in his palm. Delighted, Jo Chan-young strode towards me.

[Great.]

[This hamster is so violent.]

[It's because he's scared.]

Jung Garam overpowered my struggles and handed me over to his fellow guildmate, and Jo Chan-young gently stroked my back with a finger. Though I stayed still due to my exhaustion, I hadn't given up. I couldn't live as a hamster forever in Jo Chan-young's cage.

However, no matter how much I wanted to rebel, I could not overcome this insurmountable power gap. I tried to wriggle with my entire body to slip his grasp, but, exhausted, I endured the dizziness by slumping against his finger.

It was then.

[What are you doing to my Lee-kyung-ie, Chan-young-ah?]

A familiar voice rang out–my savior. At the same time, Jo Chan-young, who had been trying to gently shove me into the cage, stopped in his tracks.

I leaned my head back, struggles renewed, when his hand stopped. Though the Mage's voice was playful, Seo Dawon's face was cold as if he were furious.

What was even more unfair was that his gaze was fixed upon me–as if he were actually angry at me.

'Seo Dawon seems to still recognize that I'm 'Choi Lee-kyung' though… That's a relief.'

I frowned and racked my brain to figure out how to proceed in this situation. He'd probably be vindictive since I took advantage of his goodwill by pretending to be sick in order to escape… But, I didn't think Seo Dawon would be fooled by my lie. My body automatically trembled when I imagined the future pain the Mage would inflict upon me, and the pain I had already suffered underneath his suspicion.

Judging by how Bang Eunji suddenly disappeared, she must be observing me from somewhere, waiting for me to showcase how I seduced her guild leader. But… looking at Seo Dawon's cold attitude right now, that wouldn't be an easy matter.

'S-Should I have not come out?'

In the end, I gave the Mage, who was still staring blatantly at me, a clumsy smile. However, Seo Dawon's expression only became fiercer at that action.

[Guildmaster…. No, Seo Dawon-ssi.]

At that moment, Jo Chan-young cut off our staring contest and stood before the Mage. His voice was incredibly different from the foolish and

almost coddling tone he adopted earlier while trying to coax and comfort me.

Seo Dawon raised one eyebrow at Jo Chan-young's chilly countenance, but he soon returned his guildmate's gaze. Jo Chan-young raised his head, clenching his fist with the hand that didn't hold me. He then began to calmly but angrily criticize the Mage.

[You've abused an animal and now you're pretending to be all buddy-buddy with me? How shameless.]

[What are you talking about?]

[Ha. Are you trying to deny everything now? Didn't I tell you that hamsters are not dolls? This cutie won't go back with you.]

Seo Dawon tilted his head at Jo Chan-young's harsh rebuke before turning to look at me. As soon as we made eye contact, I quickly gathered all my strength to shout, "D-Dawon-ah!"

[……]

"Save me from this fate! I'm really sorry! I'll explain everything, so…!!"

[……]

"I-If I'm put inside that cage, I'll have to continue living as a hamster…"

Even though he clearly heard my cries, Seo Dawon despicably didn't respond. The other two in the room merely glanced at me–my shouts probably sounded like shrill hamster squeaks from their perspective.

Humiliated, I teared up–I knew Bang Eunji would be watching this. When Seo Dawon turned away from me, as if he hadn't heard me, I hurriedly shouted once more, worried that he would really just abandon me like this. "Seo Dawon, I know you can hear everything…! A-Are you just going to send me away with Jo Chan-young?"

[……]

“You may… n-never see me again…”

Only then did the Mage turn to look at me. Afterwards, he glanced at Jo Chan-young and Jung Garam’s expressions out of the corners of his eyes. Then, he murmured to himself–

[Everyone still seems to think he’s a hamster…?]

[What are you saying?]

[Huh?]

Then, he looked at me again, as if he were confirming his hypothesis.

“Nngh…” I felt anxious at the sight of the corners of his lips rising–the Mage often adopted that expression just before bullying me intensely. And, once again, my hunch wasn’t wrong…

[Chan-young-ah, this is a misunderstanding… Lee-kyung-ie isn’t a simple hamster to me.]

Seo Dawon suddenly made a melancholic expression.

[…What are you talking about?]

Jo Chan-young asked, brows furrowed.

Seo Dawon replied in an abominably sweet voice–

[Lee-kyung-ie is a very intelligent hamster; I can’t raise him like any normal hamster.]

[What…]

[It’s true–you can check. Lee-kyung-ie can do things that ordinary hamsters can’t do.]

With that said, the Mage gave me a meaningful glace. It was as if he were telling me, ‘Take a hint.’

When I gave him a slight nod–still feeling anxious–the Mage turned towards Jo Chan-young and suggested–

[Release Lee-kyung-ie.]

[What?]

[He probably won’t run away. In fact, he’ll probably come running straight at me?]

Become a Patron!

TL: It’s okay Jo Chanyoung, I’ll raise cats with you. I promise I have no intention of putting maid dresses on any animals.

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Chapter 319

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Jo Chan-young snorted at Seo Dawon's words–

[What, did you train him or something? Some animal-handling skills don't prove that what you did wasn't abuse.]

[Don't you think you'll be able to see for yourself afterwards?]

[……]

However, Seo Dawon's relaxed attitude seemed to agitate Jo Chan-young somewhat. He looked down at me with a stern look on his face.

At that moment, I felt a little depressed as I realized I would need to put on a simulacrum of a circus act. 'But, if I don't do this, I don't think Jo Chan-young will give up….'

I tried to think positively, but I found it positively humiliating to act like a hamster(?) for Bang Eunji, who was probably still observing from some unknown location. What would she think of me after this?!

Meanwhile, though the Summoner seemed to be suspicious until the very end, he eventually acquiesced to the Mage's confidence. His tone laden with doubt, he threatened–

[…If you use a weird skill, I'm going to leave immediately with Cutie.]

[Do as you please.]

Seo Dawon smiled cheekily, as if he had expected that response.

Though Jo Chan-young was hostile towards the Mage due to the Mage's suspected abuse, it was clear the man still had some trust– that he still couldn't entirely believe the Mage would do something so heinous. He soon relaxed his grip and gently bent down to place me on the floor.

'How on earth did Seo Dawon recruit someone who's only warm and affectionate towards animals?'

After noticing their unexpectedly close relationship, I glanced up at Jo Chan-young, but, at the following call, I looked back to the owner of that voice.

[Lee-kyung-ah.]

Even though he merely called my name, I could sense a hint of annoyance within those words.

My shoulders flinched, and I quickly ran towards the Mage. Immediately, Jo Chan-young muttered a quick 'Hmph!' behind me.

Not long after the Mage called me, I reached his feet; Seo Dawon pretended as if he hadn't urged me to his side. I grabbed onto the ends of his shoes and cranked my neck back far enough to look up at the Mage; he looked down at me with a strange, mysterious smile.

I became incredibly anxious at that expression, but, with no other choice, I hovered at his feet and shouted, stretching my arms up, "A-Aren't you going to pick me up?"

However, for some reason, Seo Dawon's horrible smile became more intense.

Seo Dawon crouched down as if he were about to pick me up, but instead of holding me in his grasp, he grabbed me by the maid skirt with two fingers and created some distance between us by dragging me away.

I looked up at him, bewildered, at the unexpected push; my body froze where he left me. After thoroughly disheartening me, Seo Dawon calmly ordered–

[Lee-kyung-ah, if you want to go with me, then lie flat on the ground.]

"…What?"

[If you want to go with me, show me your belly.]

My mouth opened wide from shock, but Seo Dawon merely smiled in a leisurely manner. He had no qualms about treating me like some puppy.

"You… Are you… insane? Hey!"

[If you don't want to, then go to Chan-young-ie.]

"……" Seo Dawon responded, despicably, at my shaking protests. Furthermore, Jo Chan-young's sarcastic remarks from behind me didn't help my situation at all.

[Do you think a hamster is a dog?]

[Lee-kyung-ie understands everything that's being said.]

[He looks like he understands nothing, though?]

[Really? Then, I guess I thought wrong.]

[What on…]

Though I wasn't familiar with Jo Chan-young, Seo Dawon's last words were like a subtle threat to me. It was only then did I realize that he wouldn't easily let go of his anger.

"S-Seo Dawon… Y-You're being too much… I said I'd…explain everything!" I tried my hardest to plead with him, but all I received in return was the Mage's frustrating smile and elegant disregard.

[If Lee-kyung-ie doesn’t flop over onto the ground in 5 seconds, you can take him and raise him well.]

[…Let’s do that.]

[5, 4-]

He even started a countdown. I quickly sat down on the floor and laid prone on the ground. “…I-I’m doing it! I did, alright?!”

With my body stuck to the floor, I looked at Seo Dawon. He smirked quite obviously, perhaps enjoying this humiliation.

No–I was certain about his enjoyment. The Mage followed with more unreasonable orders, as if he were a drill sergeant during my time in the army.

[Lee-kyung-ie, roll to the left.]

[Now, to the right.]

[Hug my fingers tightly.]

“……”

Even though my eyes were tearing up, I did as he asked. Lastly, the Mage made a circle with his thumb and index finger, and I stuck my head through… He made me do every trick a dog was known to do.

And, after watching all that, Jo Chan-young said to his guildmaster, genuinely amazed–

[…He’s truly a genius hamster…]

[I didn’t train him. Lee-kyung-ie understands everything I say. He wants to stay with me, after all.]

[That’s…]

[Chan-young-ie also knows that hamsters can’t be trained like this.]

[……]

In the end, Jo Chan-young couldn’t refute those words and stared blatantly at me. And his eyes were…how should I put it…more passionate than his previous stares? However, he retreated a few steps as he judged that I was following the Mage out of my own will.

[…Then, did Cutie want to wear all those clothes?]

[He prefers to wear clothes.]

[…How strange. However, I…I suppose I have to trust my eyes even if I can’t fully believe them.]

[Don’t worry. I’ll take care of him well.]

When Jo Chan-young stepped back, accepting those words, I was finally placed atop Seo Dawon’s palm.

I buried my face into his hand, laying face down and hoping that this shame and humiliation would soon pass. However, my small tears would not stop no matter how hard I tried. I blamed Seo Dawon inwardly, wiping at my eyes with both arms.

‘Seriously… So mean.’

Was this fun for him? I wanted to curse and shout that out loud. However, I was simply sad about this entire situation.

In that way, my brief escape ended in humiliation. After saying his farewells to Jo Chan-young, Seo Dawon left the room without another word to me.

After I was held tightly in his hand, I smelled the familiar scent of his private study.

Click–

“Ah…” When I heard the soft close of the door, I looked through the gaps of his fingers and looked at his office. Then, seeing the pandemonium–the messy state of his room–I gasped unwittingly.

As if he had guessed the origins of my surprise, the Mage asked in a derisive tone–

[How was your recent outing, Lee-kyung-ah?]

“A-Argh…!!”

He’s humiliated me so much, but his anger has yet to subside?!

However, I had a lot to complain about as well. I immediately bit his finger to vent my anger, but Seo Dawon lightly pressed my cheeks together with his thumb and index finger. Then, looking at my trembling, he continued to speak–

[I ordered a new house that you’re going to live in from now on.]

As I listened to the Mage, I instinctively searched for the two-story dollhouse I had stayed in, but it was nowhere to be found.

Then, as I lowered my gaze further to the ground, I saw a familiar wall lying half-broken on the floor. The house I had stayed in had been badly damaged, as if someone had thrown it into the wall and smashed it.

I couldn’t tear my gaze away–it was so disturbing and somewhat heartbreaking. After checking what I was gazing at, the Mage smirked.

[I had thought you were frustrated with the place–maybe it was too small.]

“……”

[There’s no owner like me, right, Lee-kyung-ah?]

He was clearly intimidating me. Though I was frightened by the underlying implications, I finally protested through my trembles. “You’re not my owner.”

Seo Dawon smirked at my glares and pulled at my cheeks–

[No? Then you should have followed Jo Chan-young. What are you saying now after following all my directions?]

"Jo Chan-young thinks I'm a hamster!"

[It's not so different with me as well. You don't feel particularly like a human.]

"What….?" I looked up at him, shocked. The gleam in Seo Dawon's eyes was darker than I had expected.

Seo Dawon stared at me and pulled at the maid suit he had personally placed on my body; with one tug from his fingers, the dress tore easily. All this felt…somehow creepy. I reflexively covered up my exposed shoulders, but Seo Dawon pressed my hands with the tips of his nails, restricting my movements.

He looked down at me with an incomprehensible expression and asked in a quietly reproachful tone–

[Why did you lie to me?]

"……"

[I was going crazy–I thought I'd find you dead.]

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Guys, the horror is just beginning

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Chapter 320

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t.w: mentions of suicide

Of course, when thinking about it from his perspective, Seo Dawon's anxiety was understandable. First of all, I looked like a hamster to others, but I could have been in incredible danger.

If I had escaped the building as he had feared, there were things that threatened my life anywhere I went. Let alone other people, dogs and cats roamed around the hub as well.

However, I was also sure that his concerns over my safety wouldn't make Seo Dawon so violent this time–he was trying to tame me once more. That implication came through when he showed me this broken house.

'Seo Dawon… You punk. Are you trying to control me here as well…?'

As I became deeply acquainted with Seo Dawon back in my reality, I learned what existed deep in his subconscious mind.

Rather, should I say he's more vulnerable to falling into a certain tendency than other people? When he encountered feelings or things that didn't go his way, he was much more stressed than others. Things like saying how it would have been easier if he didn't like me…his tendency to just ignore or kill issues.

However…

‘For someone who is attracted and in love but can’t be honest with his feelings…’

All his mental faculties were consumed by my mere existence.

Furthermore, even if I liked Seo Dawon, I didn’t want to give up my entire life’s purpose for him, unlike those that had liked him in the past.

It was the first time *this* Seo Dawon would have experienced something like this, so obviously he wouldn’t understand these tumultuous emotions. It would be the first time he met someone he likes but doesn’t move as he pleases. He’s never failed to coerce another with his appearance, ability, and personality.

‘That’s why he’s nervous.’

I looked up at the Mage and sighed. First, once I understood the underlying emotions, I wasn’t scared nor impressed by his violent attitude.

Seo Dawon raised his eyebrows at my sigh. He was obviously displeased by my calm attitude.

Rrrippp–

I looked straight back at Seo Dawon as I tore off the pervy maid top that I had wanted to rip off for a long while. When I took off the ragged torn cloth and tied it around my waist, my bare upper body felt a little cold from the cooling sweat.

However, I straightened my back and pretended to feel fine. And, I firmly answered my insolent servant, “I’m sorry to have worried you… but I wasn’t going to live like this for the rest of my life, understand?”

[……]

“I know you…like me a lot. However… It’s quite burdensome for me when you act so foolishly.”

“I have a place I need to return to, after all.”

Seo Dawon fell silent, but I felt like he was inwardly snorting to himself. As expected, Seo Dawon responded in a sarcastic and despicable voice–

[Really? I’m curious how you’ll get there by yourself… You can’t even change clothes without help.]

“I’ll return to my human form soon, so don’t worry.”

[……]

However, the line made by Seo Dawon’s lips hardened when he heard my firm answer. He stared at me again, as if he were trying to measure the validity of my words, and soon reached for me. I didn’t bother to run away and docilely let him take a hold of my body.

Seo Dawon pressed lightly at my neck bone with his index finger and thumb before releasing me. Then, when I stared at him nonchalantly through his subtle intimidation, his expression became quite rigid. He soon relaxed his face, but I didn’t miss his agitation.

The Mage continued to make thinly-veiled threats–

[Choi Lee-kyung. Don’t you think I could break your leg easily like this?]

“……”

[Where are you going to go? You can’t go anywhere without my permission.]

Seo Dawon slowly pressed at my kneecap over the flowing skirt. I felt significant pressure, but, instead of complaining about the pain, I continued to stare back.

Then, I asked him, “What’s the point of doing all this?”

[What kind of answer is Lee-kyung-ie anticipating?]

“Be honest with me. You want me to be by your side, don’t you?”

Simultaneously, the pressure on my knees weakened; Seo Dawon slowly blinked at me. However, soon, he hid his brief hesitation and spoke in a stubborn, cold voice–

[You should say it properly, Lee-kyung-ah.]

“……”

[You can’t get out of here without my help anyway.]

With that said, he relaxed his grip, releasing my leg, and waited for my response.

I stared back, pressing down on my now stiff thighs. When Seo Dawon made eye contact with me, he closed his lips as if he were holding back some words. Perhaps he was agitated by my angry expression.

However, I didn’t hold myself back like the Mage. I burst my bubble of anger without embellishing or excluding anything from what I planned to convey, “Then… I guess I’ll die.”

[…What?]

“My business here is all finished anyway. I met Eunji and everything.”

[What the…]

“Now, I no longer need to struggle to survive while being wary of your thoughts and actions.” I have no idea what expression I was making at the moment, but I noticed that he was momentarily shaken. His hand, still holding my body, trembled slightly.

I wasn’t lying, so I wasn’t that surprised to see how agitated he was.

‘He pretends that my will and my wants don’t matter, but…’

To be frank, Seo Dawon wanted to be with me. He wanted me to just give into him and settle for what he gives me. The threat of breaking my leg was just a means to keep me from leaving him.

However, by suggesting the possibility of staying by his side through my own will, Seo Dawon seemed to realize what he truly wanted.

I could clearly distinguish two things from his gradually hardening expression. “If you break my leg, do you think I’ll beg and cling to you? Did you think that because I acted so kindly to you–with no criticisms–after you broke my ribs, that I’ll do the same now…?”

[You…]

“If you do something like that again, I will never forgive you. I’ll bite my tongue and commit suicide. I won’t say a word to you, and I’ll throw up anything I eat. If you want to have such a futile argument with me, then break my leg immediately. No, you’d better cut off my limbs and make sure I can’t bite my tongue instead.”

[……]

“That way, at least I won’t ‘die.'”

Seo Dawon didn’t respond; he merely stared down at me with flustered eyes. It seemed like he was trying to determine whether or not I could follow through with my threats…whether or not he could bear it if I did.

However, the Mage could not come to a satisfactory conclusion. He merely placed more strength in his grip…as if, once enough strength was used, he could hold me forever.

[…Fine. Then tell me your terms first. If it’s something reasonable, I’ll cooperate.]

“……”

[You were a normal-sized person before, right? Isn’t that why you want to return to your previous state?]

“…….”

[I had already ordered Choi Kyung-sik to investigate this matter. Once information from his side comes in, I’ll be able to help you return to your original body. I can also request a size-change potion to be made–no one can match Choi Kyung-sik in this field.]

After being silent for a long time, Seo Dawon offered conciliatory conditions of his own.

However, I was not interested in the terms he offered. After all, the Mage only dangled short-term necessities–what I needed most in my current condition–as bait.

If I were a normal user, it would be hard to turn down this offer. After all, who would want to live as a hamster forever?

However, I was only here temporarily to sign a contract with Bang Eunji. Even if he looked like the man I loved, I shouldn’t be caught up with what was only a remnant.

The penalty my body sustained now was only a nightmare that would end when I finished signing the contract. However, Seo Dawon was unaware of this. Perhaps my tranquil attitude contributed to his growing anxiety.

So, mustering further ease, I was able to push him further, “So… Why on Earth would you so desperately want to possess me?”

[……]

“Answer me properly, Dawon-ah. Don’t play around with your words.”

Seo Dawon, who had been silent all this while, frowned and finally asked–

[Is this really that important?]

Become a Patron!

TL: I guess the only way to beat a yandere…is to threaten to kill yourself?

Honestly, ya'll, I didn't think I'd need to trigger warning so much when I started this novel. It's uh…only going to get scarier from here O.O

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Chapter 321

Chapter 321

This conversation reminded me of one I had in the past–when I wasn't sure of Seo Dawon's heart. At that time, when the Mage asked, 'Do my feelings matter?' I was frustrated and wanted to hit him.

And, above all, this made me feel miserable. If I bravely said that this matter was very important to me, I felt I'd be releasing one of my advantages in this tug-of-war battle I was having with the Mage.

That is to say, I was worried that I would be faced with evidence that Seo Dawon treated me like some toy or joke.

'In the end, I couldn't push it further back then. I was too afraid of his true feelings.'

However, I knew that *this* Seo Dawon was desperately holding onto our tug-of-war rope. In this [Vengeful Ghost Memory], he was neither dead nor obsessed with revenge; however, I could notice that he desperately wanted me by his side.

That's why I was able to be firm in my demands. "Of course it's important."

[……]

"After all, you may be holding onto me because you think I'm some unusual pet."

At those words, Seo Dawon smiled–

[Do you think I'm Jo Chan-young?]

"From my point of view, there's not much difference between you or him."

[That's so mean.]

Despite saying that, Seo Dawon didn't release me. He lifted me up in his hand, bringing me to eye level, covering my shoulder with a handkerchief he had taken out from his suit pocket.

The handkerchief smelled sweet, as if he had infused it with perfume. I looked at the Mage, bewildered, but I didn't refuse his kind gesture due to his cold eyes and the chilliness I felt on my bare skin. Seo Dawon's expression became softer as I held the ends of the handkerchief as if the cloth was a shawl.

However, this sudden affection must be an attempt to stall time. As he delicately touched the handkerchief as if he were wrapping a luxurious watch around his wrist, the Mage did not speak. He continued to have a stubborn staring contest with me who stared blatantly back at him.

I gripped his index finger to express my dissatisfaction. At that moment, Seo Dawon gently rubbed that index finger against my cheek as if to soothe me.

After a few seconds, he opened his mouth with a short sigh–

[I… Wanted to endure…to hold it in…until you returned to normal.]

"You're talking about my size?"

[Honestly, your size is a bit too 'cute,' for me to make an honest confession. I wanted to be certain of my emotions as well.]

"……"

I didn’t want to interpret his words in such a way, but… It sounded as if he wanted me to return to a normal human size. That is to say, as soon as I returned to my real self, he’d confess straight away.

For some reason, my body wanted to wriggle; my heart began to pound violently. Of course, I didn’t fall for this lip service though. I tried to calm down by pressing my palm to my galloping heart.

‘No! We can’t move past this so fast! For something like that, this hamster size… He took advantage of it so much to use that excuse!’

Even when I thought about it again, this wasn’t how someone who was disappointed about my size would behave. Besides, he’s not even antsy either…

‘The dollhouse he had made for me in earnest… Honestly, even if I stayed this size, he seemed to prefer my inability to escape his grasp…’

Even though it was pure lip service, I wanted to hear more of Seo Dawon’s excuses.

So, when I unwittingly looked at him with eagerness on my face, Seo Dawon noticed my softened attitude–with his ghost-like keenness–and smiled–

[A hamster’s life span is only three years… right?]

I shouted, enraged, “Honestly…! I’m not a real hamster!”

[It’d be easier if you were a real hamster. Besides, you haven’t told me why you’re in this situation either.]

“That’s…”

[You acted as if you knew me intimately when you first met me. Furthermore, you actually knew my personality well. However, I didn’t know you, so I had to be cautious.]

“……”

[You don’t have anything more to say about this?]

My mouth clammed up from the sudden counterattack. To try and explain a [Vengeful Ghost Memory] to someone within that memory…

I thought I’d fail, no matter what. The Mage continued calmly as if he had expected my reaction–

[Even so, you expect me to be honest with you. How greedy.]

“……”

As Seo Dawon had said, perhaps I was making an unreasonable demand. He placed my fingernail-sized hand on top of his fingertips and rubbed it gently. As if…he were fiddling with my hands.

Then, he approached close to my face before slowly pulling me even closer.

I was a little puzzled, but I stayed still; soon, his lips came closer. It would have been scary if those lips widened before my eyes, but Seo Dawon didn’t eat me (!) and instead pressed his lips hard to my head.

When I raised my head, surprised at the heavy pressure, Seo Dawon looked down at me with a smile. My reflection was caught in his night-like eyes.

I hurriedly lowered my head again because I was embarrassed and shy, but I couldn’t block my ears from hearing the words that followed.

[But I still want to believe you because… you sometimes stare at me with an unbelievably adorable face.]

“……!”

Listening to the Mage’s mutters, I felt my ears turn a burning red.

I hurriedly tried to bow my head even lower, but Seo Dawon’s creeping fingertip lifted my face; the Mage scrutinized my expression. Half-

mischievous and half-uncertain, he asked–

[If I say what I need to, will you stay calmly by my side?]

"……"

[Should I be more explicit with my words?]

I almost nodded at Seo Dawon's smiling face, but… I still managed to retain my wits and consciousness that my goal hadn't changed despite this tender atmosphere. I had come so far and had managed to draw this much attention.

'Bang Eunji is sure to be watching…'

Does she still think that I haven't seduced the Mage according to her standards?

The only reason I could stop this entire matter from becoming a mess was because I could keep in mind that I was within a [Vengeful Ghost Memory], but, honestly, I was too weak to Seo Dawon's face.

The Mage in front of me felt a bit unpolished–as he would have been when he was alive. Perhaps it was more accurate to state that the Mage had a harder time filtering out his awkward and hesitant inner emotions.

The hand holding me was a little tense, the area of his cheek surrounding the corners of his lips was a little rigid, and his large smile was gradually extinguishing. I found it lovable how the Mage tried to bluff his nonchalance–that he wasn't affected.

I wanted to enjoy, for a long while, this man's honest affections even though the Mage's cheeks didn't blush. I needed to tear my eyes away from his face–from this unexpected cute side–before I was ruined… Everything felt so different from previous memories, where I felt that I couldn't quite intervene.

And the more he showed how different he was from the Seo Dawon that I knew…

‘I really miss the real Seo Dawon…’

A deep longing flooded my body.

When I thought of the real Mage, my mouth didn’t open easily. I lowered my gaze a little, while still keeping the fake Seo Dawon in view; the ring that the real ‘Seo Dawon’ had placed on my finger before I had entered this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] caught my eye.

‘If I return and say…that this ring was of no use, what would he say? Will he be flustered?’

From then on, my brain began to be filled with thoughts about the real Mage.

‘Don’t tell me he’s going to treat me like a fool for not knowing how to utilize it?’

To be frank, I had no idea how this ring worked. However, considering how the Seo Dawon here recognized that I was a ‘person’ after the ring shone, the accessory wasn’t completely unhelpful.

At that moment, suddenly, a dark shadow fell on my head.

[What are you doing?]

“Huh? Ah….” I focused again on the ‘Seo Dawon’ in front of me, wiping away my diverted thoughts.

However, the Mage somehow looked displeased; he looked at my hand which was still stuck atop his fingertip, and then he looked towards the ringed finger I was looking at until a little while ago. I tried to read his countenance; the man gave off an ominous feeling.

‘Can he see this ring as well…?’

[Come to think of it, I was curious about this. Who gave you the ring?]

“Huh?”

[The design is the same as my own ring.]

‘Damn it… As expected, Seo Dawon must also have this same exact ring during this time period.’ I smiled awkwardly, worried that I was now truly in a fix.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: At the time I translated this, I was running on fumes from 3 hours of sleep so…The proofreading may be a bit rougher than usual today. Please tell me if I’ve made any typos/mistakes in either the comments or, honestly the better option, the discord! Thank you T_T

I miss the real Seo Dawon as well, Lee-kyung-ah. Also wtf does he mean by “I wanted to endure” until Lee-kyung returned to normal? Hah???

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Chapter 322

Chapter 322

"…It's too complicated. I'll tell you when I return to my original size."

[……]

"I-It's true."

Seo Dawon squinted at my awkward expression–

[You can't even tell me who gave it to you?]

"…R-Rather than being unable to, I…"

[Is it someone I know?]

"……"

Seo Dawon continued to question me, but I only pulled back with an awkward smile. Although, of course, he gripped me straight away so I couldn't retreat any further.

Seo Dawon watched me sweat before eventually placing me on the desk with a long sigh. I felt a bit more comfortable when the soles of my feet touched the firm surface. I glanced up at him while loosening the handkerchief draped around my shoulders.

However, after releasing me from his hands, the Mage asked a completely random question–

[Who do you like better–the person who gave you that ring or me?]

"What?"

[It'd be best to answer me honestly.]

Seo Dawon tapped me on the head. I stumbled, frowned, and grabbed his fingertips, "Are you threatening me?"

[That's impossible.]

"I told you to not treat me like some toy!"

[Did the guy who gave you the ring treat you better than I do?]

Once I realized that Seo Dawon was being unfairly grumpy and unjustly bullying me, I pushed him away as hard as I could. Grinning, he asked persistently–

[Is that your answer?]

My hands shook at the despicable question, but I still had an excuse ready. I spoke clearly, staring back at the Mage, "…Of course, the person I like is…! Seo Dawon…"

[Your expression begs to differ.]

Though he listened to me, his doubtful face didn't lighten.

Of course, the Seo Dawon I mentioned wasn't the person in front of me. I liked the Seo Dawon that was less arrogant, more cynical, and needed me more.

However, I didn't hate this guy either. So, I was able to answer with confidence, "I didn't lie."

[….Hm.]

“So, you should confess too! You have to say it properly, alright?” I grabbed his sleeve and shook it, my thoughts still focused on Bang Eunji. It was clear from the Mage’s expression that he was still suspicious of me, but he eventually smiled and said–

[Fine. Then, listen carefully.]

“Y-Yes?” I gulped down my saliva, put my hands together, and lifted my head to stare back at him. He returned my gaze before calling out to me with a sweet tone–

[Lee-kyung-ah.]

“……”

[You’re a bit suspicious, timid, and stupid, but…]

“……?”

[But still, from now on, I need you to stay by my side.]

“……”

I waited patiently for him to continue, but, no matter how much I stared at him, the Mage’s lips remained closed.

Eventually, I asked him again, brows furrowed, “….Wait. That’s it?”

[Yeah.]

Seo Dawon’s answer was obnoxiously short. Dumbfounded, I asked in a bewildered tone, “This… Hey! Is this a confession to you?”

[Of course. How could I be more honest than this?”

I screamed at his response, “Who talks like this to someone he likes?”

At this point, Bang Eunji naturally wouldn’t appear.

I shook Seo Dawon’s sleeve again in protest. I wanted to get this over with and receive a proper confession, but the Mage merely looked down at me with a smile.

“Don’t just smile and ignore me!”

[What do you mean, ‘ignore?’]

I almost lost all reason with that nonchalant response. In the end, I soothed my anger by inwardly stating that I was the one who made the mistake. Trying to take the wind out of my temperamental sails, I asked in a warm tone, “You’re not going to say anything like ‘I like you,’ or something similar?”

[Ahhh… You wanted to hear something like that?]

“I-Isn’t that obvious?! That’s a real confession.” I nodded happily, thinking that Seo Dawon finally understood my words. But…

[But I don’t want to? I have my own pride. Isn’t it a bit weird to confess to a guy who won’t take off a ring given to him by some other bastard?]

“Hey…! This is… There’s a reason for this!”

[I know. That’s why I haven’t cut off your finger and let the matter lie.]

“Argh…!”

He kept playing games with me until the very end.

Fed up, I tried to kick his finger angrily. However, as soon as I kicked, he moved his hand backwards, and I almost stumbled.

I barely managed to regain my balance; my body trembled in anger. Forced to recall his words, I placed a little strength on the ring; surprisingly, the ring slipped off my finger.

I clenched it in my fist and shouted at the Mage, “Is that enough?!”

[……]

Seo Dawon held back his laughter, shoulders trembling, but he couldn’t hold out for a very long time. Eventually, his laughter erupted.

Then, before I could curse him even more, he held me in his hand, lifted me up, and gently pressed me with his thumb–so disgustingly sweet.

[You’re so cute, Lee-kyung-ah.]

“Shut up.”

[Really? You don’t want to hear a confession from me?]

“Eeek… Fine, do it quickly!”

Seo Dawon giggled and poked my anxious cheeks. However, there was still a long way to go before a confession was given. Seo Dawon looked at me with a mysterious expression before making a perverted remark.

[I want to put you in my mouth and roll you around.]

“…That’s not it. Say it properly!”

[Your crying face is also to my taste.]

“…I knew it. You perverted bastard… You teased me a few times just to make me cry, you…”

[But you still like me, don’t you?]

“……”

[Say you like me until I’m satisfied.]

I glared at Seo Dawon’s arrogance. Though it wouldn’t be too difficult because he wore the face of the man I loved, this behavior was just too

annoyingly similar to the real Seo Dawon. “I won’t do it! You’ll keep saying it’s not enough anyway.”

Seo Dawon laughed after I spoke and soon muttered some piercing remarks to himself–

[Rather than it not being enough… For some reason, I think you’ll disappear if I say I like you.]

“….What?”

[So, I don’t want to say it.]

Of course, I only had thoughts of returning to my original world after hearing his confession and signing the contract… The confession was basically the means for me to sign with Bang Eunji.

How on earth did he know about that?

Startled, I couldn’t hide my agitation and looked up at him blankly; Seo Dawon smiled sharply when our eyes met. He rubbed my chest as he pressed down slightly.

[Your heart is beating incredibly fast.]

“…No…”

[I see you can’t lie. I wonder where you were thinking of disappearing to.]

“…N-No. I said it’s not that. You misunderstand…”

Although I denied it all belatedly, Seo Dawon’s thoughts were already far away. Conviction steeled, he whispered to me with a languid smile–

[I want to put handcuffs on you instead of rings.]

“What?”

[After all, someone managed to lose you even though they gave you a ring.]

With that said, he kissed me on the chin. I looked at him bewildered, but I couldn’t wriggle out of his hand.

With me still in his grasp, the Mage took a very small box out of his inventory. The box was blocked by bars on all sides; anyone could see that it resembled a mouse-trap.

I looked at the thing, eyes wide open in disbelief; Seo Dawon opened the lid of the box without any hesitation. He then tried to place me inside. I shouted desperately, struggling in fear…afraid of being stuck in that trap. “Hey…! Don’t tell me, you… It’s not true, right? This really isn’t what I think it is, Seo Dawon. Hey! Seo Dawon!”

[About the ring you’re wearing.]

“What?”

[I made it myself.]

“…Huh?”

[Did the ‘Seo Dawon’ you like not tell you about that?]

I was both surprised and suffocated by those words.

How and when did the Mage before me notice? I looked up at his smiling face and opened my mouth, but I couldn’t think of anything to say.

And I became increasingly afraid of him. To be exact, I felt a vague anxiety that the level of this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] had exceeded my expectations.

And, as I expected, Seo Dawon was no longer wearing the Mage’s facade. As he pushed me into the trap, his face had blackened where most of his features should be.

“You…”

[That’s why…]

However, his voice was still that of the lovely Seo Dawon. This unidentified anomaly whispered to me, imitating my beloved Mage.

[When the handcuffs are finished…]

"……."

[I'll say I like…I love you as much as you want.]

The trap closed with a snap as soon as his sentence ended, and I was plunged into a narrow darkness.

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: This begs the question doesn't it? What are these Vengeful Ghost Memories? The novel will go into them later, but I'm so curious >.<

Also, the author is like that Oprah meme w/ bees. "YOU GET A YANDERE, YOU GET A YANDERE."
Everywhere I look/read, it's all yanderes.

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Chapter 323

Chapter 323

“Since when?” I rubbed my goosebump-ridden arm in that dark box–without a single source of light–as I recalled what had happened.

I had thought that the operation was progressing smoothly, but suddenly, as if history was repeating itself, I was trapped.

“Did Bang Eunji do this?”

However, I felt that that conclusion wasn’t quite right. This had nothing to do with the conditions she offered, and Seo Dawon’s change was out of the scope of her [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

I pondered on the conversation I had with the Mage just before he had suddenly changed… and a small hunch bubbled to the surface of my mind.

“…No way, is it because I took off that ring?”

Just in case, I placed the ring back on my finger.

However, unlike before, the ring didn’t shine as it fit to my finger’s size–there wasn’t much of a reaction at all. It was simply a normal ring.

I removed and wore the ring again several times, rubbed it and twisted it from side to side. Still, there was no response.

“What kind of guide is this… Damn.”

Eventually, patience running out, I kicked the cramped walls a couple of times before flopping to the ground.

In light of this dreary situation, even the Seo Dawon who had placed the ring on me seemed so merciless. Couldn’t he have explained everything better? Perhaps I could have escaped if I had received some guidance. However, all the ring seemed to do was to provoke that unidentifiable being wearing Seo Dawon’s face…

“He’s not going to lock me up forever, right…?”

No matter how hard I wracked my brains, I couldn’t reach a solid answer; my fear continued to grow. The only people that didn’t see me as a hamster were Bang Eunji and that fake Seo Dawon.

My fear was heightened even more by the fact that I couldn’t feel any movement from the box. If the walls and floor shook–even a little–then, I could guess that the Mage was taking me somewhere. However, I couldn’t discern any outside noise, let alone a hint of movement. It felt like I was thrown into a disconnected location.

“It’s too dark…”

I wanted to keep holding out, but my voice, ringing and echoing through this dark space, was already trembling.

“What would happen if I died here…?” I mumbled, fiddling with the ring on my left finger.

[…–y! Can you hear me?]

“Arrgh!!”

Just then, a familiar voice could be heard from the ring.

I sprang to my feet, amazed and startled; to my surprise, the voice kept flowing from the ring…though her voice sounded a bit like it was filtered

through a water-soaked radio.

“B-Bang Eunji?”

[…You… Where on earth are you?]

That was definitely Bang Eunji’s voice.

I felt as if my savior had finally arrived; I ripped the ring off my finger and placed it close to my ear. As soon as I did so, her near-inaudible voice became clearer.

[I said, ‘Where on earth are you!’]

“C-Can you hear me?”

[I can hear you! Where are you?]

Before I answered her words, my mind wandered for a bit, wondering if the ring had this function before. But, I quickly returned to my senses and answered her–I had no free time to be so absent-minded. “I… S-Seo Dawon just now… caught me and locked me up.”

[What did you say?]

“Well, to be exact, it’s not Seo Dawon, but… Anyway, I’m in a small box.”

[A box…]

Eunji muttered, as if she were dumbfounded by my response, but she didn’t argue any further. She spat out a familiar skill invocation–

[Chaser.]

“……”

However, as if something went wrong, Bang Eunji’s voice rose to a sharp pitch–

[Unbelievable. You're in some place I can't navigate to?]

Ray of hope disappearing once more, I desperately asked, "You can't navigate to me? Then, you can't find me?"

Instead of answering, Bang Eunji murmured incomprehensibly–

[This doesn't make sense… This is Eunji's 'consciousness'–a world of her own making. Why is there some location here that Eunji can't access?]

"……"

Even if she asked me directly, I, of course, would have no answer.

However, I had a small hunch that formed from my experiences with various [Vengeful Ghost Memories] as well as Koo Hui-seo's nightmare. I just hadn't fully solved this mental block yet.

What if something that polluted my mind during Koo Hui-seo's fiasco had once again contaminated this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] through the medium of my body?

'What is that 'Seo Dawon?' An intervention from the system? A side-effect from using Koo Hui-seo's blood? I don't know…but…'

For some reason, I felt that the person who stabbed me to death was similar to the 'Seo Dawon' in this memory.

"Eunji-yah! Are you perhaps unable to locate Seo Dawon?"

[…Yes. Eunji can't sense Guildleader-nim, either.]

"Are you saying that you can't target Seo Dawon with [Chaser]?"

[Eunji has already tried. Both of you disappeared suddenly, so Eunji hurriedly targeted your ring with skills instead.]

With that said, she fell silent for a short while before continuing–

[The only time Eunji's skill hasn't worked is against those that have died.]

"……" I also fell silent as I listened to her explanation.

Someone who could enter a world created by a [Vengeful Ghost] and break all the Ghost's laws; someone who could interfere with my [Vengeful Ghost Contract] and tear my soul into pieces.

I didn't know anything about him. In fact, even if I knew his identity I couldn't do anything to him in this state.

However, if I thought hard, I could guess his next actions. If, as I suspected, he was the 'Seo Dawon' who appeared in Koo Hui-seo's soul, he'll try to make sure my [Vengeful Ghost Contract] will fail.

What could I do against such a being after he had already locked me up? As I contemplated, a sudden thought shocked me into action. I quickly called to Bang Eunji, "… Bang Eunji. Where are you right now?"

[Eunji is still inside the building.]

"I-I think it could be dangerous for you, too. What should we do?"

Bang Eunji still remained calm despite hearing my anxious voice–

[So suddenly? Hmm… Well, a hamster-sized Necromancer would say something like that, Eunji supposes.]

"No. Seriously… Run away if you see Seo Dawon. Immediately. Don't try to force yourself to fight him."

[What? Please worry about yourself. Eunji has resolved to sign your [Contract], after all.]

She didn't sympathize with my fear–not even a little bit. Rather, she answered me cheerfully–

[Anyways, he's a fake wearing Guildmaster-nim's body as a mask, right? Eunji isn't so incompetent she'd lose to a fake.]

“Sure, I know about your skill, but…”

[Even if he were the real Guildmaster-nim, he’ll find it hard to go 1v1 against Eunji!]

As soon as I heard that, I remembered her overflowing pride. My suggestion to run away from a threat seemed to have offended her.

Now that she had become fired up, I had no choice but to change the subject. “S-so, I’m saying… Don’t let your guard down. I don’t know exactly what he is, but he’s quite proficient at imitating Seo Dawon. I’m sure other people will fall for it…”

[Eunji can hold onto him and force him to reveal his identity.]

Contrary to my opinion, Bang Eunji seemed energized by the thought of finding ‘Seo Dawon’ and dealing with him herself. I, who could only listen through the ring, buried my face in my palms.

‘What should I do…’

At that moment, I suddenly heard a familiar voice from behind Eunji–

[What are you doing?]

[Jung Garam-kun?]

I frowned at the sudden appearance of that strange voice–something… somehow… felt weird. But, before I could pinpoint the ominous feeling, Bang Eunji answered quickly–

[Wh-What is-? What’s with that unpleasant smile…]

[Unpleasant?]

[Well, usually Garam-kun is frowning and taking out his anger due to his height on others… Ah! Necromancer-ssi told Eunji to keep quiet about that… Cancel that–pretend you heard nothing…]

Bang Eunji talked faster than usual; perhaps she was happy that Jung Garam seemed to be taking an interest in her.

Then, a beat later, I realized what was wrong and quickly shouted, “Eunji-yah! That’s not Jung Garam! Run!”

[What?]

Bang Eunji said the newcomer was Jung Garam, but that wasn’t his voice. I shouted desperately, listening to Seo Dawon’s faint yet threatening chuckles, “Bang Eunji!!”

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TL: Aghhh I’m so tense–I wanna know what this all means!!

Also, lmao Eunji, you’re so down to go 1 v 1 with Seo Dawon.

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Chapter 324

Chapter 324

[What the…? Kyahhh!]

Bang Eunji's voice ominously cut off right there.

"Bang Eunji? Can you hear me, Bang Eunji?!"

[……]

I hoped to hear anything–any sound–but I couldn't even hear noises from her after her voice was cut off.

I didn't want to be pessimistic, but, judging by our current situation, she was probably attacked by 'Seo Dawon' and was rendered incapable of maintaining her communication skill with me through the ring. After all, most people could only use one skill at a time.

In a worst-case-scenario, Bang Eunji may have suffered a hit from 'Seo Dawon's' attack. I'm not exactly sure how that would affect the [Vengeful Ghost Contract], but I'm sure it couldn't mean anything good.

'…The worst outcome would be for me to fail to receive the contract. The [Vengeful Ghost Memory] can only be accessed once, and if I don't succeed, the opportunity will pass by forever… As nothing has changed yet, I don't seem to have failed…But, I can't afford to be leisurely about this.'

I tried to calmly brainstorm a way to escape this box or to turn the situation in my favor.

To be honest, there wasn't much I could do while stuck here. However, if I could somehow utilize the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] system, perhaps I could reign in the chaos once more. Though the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] plots were too complicated–and it was difficult to determine what the system wanted from me–the memories all had to have something in common.

Usually, when the plot finished, the Vengeful Ghost would appear and sign a contract with me. In Seo Dawon, Kim Olim, and Jung Garam's cases, I would commandeer or watch their intense memories just before their death before the contract was signed.

In other words, there was a pattern there.

I hadn't figured it all out yet, but if I could somehow utilize this hidden rule well, I may be able to complete the contract with Bang Eunji. No–I had to figure it out.

As I traced back my memories, I realized that the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] process became twisted starting with Woo Ragi's contract. Before then, with Seo Dawon, Jung Garam, and Kim Olim, I entered into a contract with them quickly after experiencing their memories or their intense hatred just before their death.

However, ever since Woo Ragi…

'Ever since then, a Seo Dawon that was different from Seo Dawon in reality–who only resembled the Mage on the surface–began to appear.'

The Seo Dawon that turned into a monster and the Seo Dawon clad in a school uniform appeared at the same time, confusing me.

I frowned as I fumbled through that distant memory.

"At that time.. They both said a lot of meaningful things."

At that time, so much had happened. It was the first time I had encountered such a deformed version of the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] that I couldn't understand the back and forth conversation properly. But, now that I think about it, the Seo Dawon that turned into a monster said a lot of significant things as soon as he saw me.

He didn't merely strangle me and show unwarranted aggression.

[Lee-kyung-ah, I'm searching for the real one.]

[After you disappeared… I ransacked the entire world searching for you.]

He made such unexpected remarks and acted somewhat unstable. According to those words, 'I' must have disappeared from the Mage's side, and he committed terrible deeds to find me.

At that time, I had experienced this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] as if I were watching a play. However, now that I thought about it, it was quite strange for Seo Dawon to appear in Woo Ragi's [Vengeful Ghost Memory.] I was deprived of the chance to learn more about Woo Ragi's ego, his memories, or his thoughts.

The abnormality of a 'Seo Dawon' shaped interference had repeatedly occurred ever since then.

"I should have asked Woo Ragi back then. Now, I'm doubtful that the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] that Woo Ragi watched and I experienced were one and the same."

I regretted not asking Woo Ragi for further details, but how would I have known the issue would become so huge? From then on, this fake 'Seo Dawon' interfered with me at every opportunity.

"…But, at that time, it seemed like Seo Dawon was divided into two different egos?"

Furthermore, the school uniform-clad Mage was also a hindrance to the completion of the [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

“That’s right… That guy also begged and pleaded for me to not return to reality.”

[Are you returning?]

[The ‘bug’ can be fixed quickly.]

[I can also modify it to match anything you want.]

He spoke as if I could stay there with him forever. In addition, the Seo-Dawon-turned-monster and the school-uniform-clad-Seo Dawon did not seem to recognize each other.

The Seo-Dawon-turned-monster attacked the other.

“What the… Then… There’s at least two groups that are invested in me failing these [Vengeful Ghost Memories]?” I jumped to attention from my slouched, crouching position, startled by my own musings. However, it soon occurred to me that there were far too few clues for me to come to a definite conclusion. At the moment, we only had ‘possibilities.’

But…

“Still… If I’m right, then which ‘Seo Dawon’ is this one?”

If, as I had suspected, there were two different obstructors…

Also, there was a noticeable difference between those two. That difference was particularly salient in Woo Ragi’s [Vengeful Ghost Memory]–where those two first appeared.

Going through those memories with a fine tooth comb, I decided to try and distinguish them again.

“For the monster… He appeared in an entirely different context than the rest of the [Vengeful Ghost Memory].”

That guy appeared in his own form (as a monster) that didn’t fit the classroom environment. Furthermore, he destroyed the original environment in the [Vengeful Ghost Memory].

However, the uniform-clad Seo Dawon was different–he mentioned that he had developed the ‘plot’ according to his and my taste. He said that ‘the bug can be fixed’ and that he can modify whatever I wanted. When placed side by side, the two really did seem like unaffiliated hindrances.

And, unlike the monstrous Seo Dawon, who attacked me without hesitation, the school uniform-clad Seo Dawon seemed eager to give me everything I wanted.

In other words…

“One side is trying to maintain the illusion, and the other is trying to break it…?”

However, since then, it’s been difficult to find a clear opportunity to distinguish the two. I wracked my brains and came up with very little. In addition, when I recalled the nightmare I had been trapped in alongside Koo Hui-seo…

“…Damn. This isn’t something I can distinguish by myself here. I should return and discuss this with Seo Dawon or the other servants. But… I neither have time nor the leisure to wait anymore.”

I eventually decided to run, head first, and brute force the argument. To be honest, the two were incredibly similar. But, I couldn’t help but remember our current ‘Seo Dawon’s’ words.

[But still, from now on, I need you to stay by my side.]

[I'll say I like…I love you as much as you want.]

"…In any case, this Seo Dawon wants to stay here forever with me, right? Like that school uniform guy…"

I now understood why he attacked Bang Eunji. I didn't know what his true motives were, but the fake Seo Dawon seemed to be afraid of me potentially waking up back in my own reality.

It felt like, to him, it was more important to keep me in this 'space' with him rather than to interrupt the [Vengeful Ghost Memory] process. That may be why he was trying to remove Bang Eunji from the equation.

Since Bang Eunji was my contract partner, meeting with her and signing the contract meant that this [Vengeful Ghost Memory] would be completed. 'Finished.' Just like jumping off of a cliff and waking from a dream, signing with her would soon move my consciousness into the real world; my mind would awake within my physical body.

In other words, Bang Eunji was basically an escape mechanism from the world this 'fake' Seo Dawon created. If I don't meet with her, I'll live here forever, as he desires.

"However, there's no way for me to go meet Bang Eunji from inside this box."

Similarly, there was no way to directly resist the fake Seo Dawon here. Eventually, I could only sigh, wondering if I had no choice but to be helpless…

"Huh…?"

Suddenly, the ring I was wearing began to transform. My eyes were wide open as they watched the ring deform, grow inside my hands, and emit light.

And, a few seconds later, the ring turned into something I knew very well.

"How…"

[Sylph's Fall]

The dagger that Seo Dawon had forced me to hold onto. Flustered, I stared vacantly down at the dagger and its blue blade, when…

Click–

Suddenly, the lid above me opened to let bright light flood inside.

I narrowed my eyes towards the light, hiding the dagger reflexively behind my back. A familiar voice bred tension and fear within me.

[Have you reflected enough?]

It was 'Seo Dawon.'

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TL: The plot thickens… Or at least makes my brain go ????

So then, are Vengeful Ghost Memories (the ones that Choi Lee-kyung fell into after Woo Ragi, at least) alternate realities?

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Chapter 325

Chapter 325

When I heard his voice, I instinctively hid the dagger between the folds of the ragged lace of my skirt.

Fortunately, ‘Seo Dawon’ must not have noticed anything; he stretched out a finger towards me without saying anything. Though I was nervous for a moment, I soon realized he was trying to lift me out. So, I relaxed my body.

‘Seo Dawon’s’ face was still blackened; I had no idea where I should look at him, so I lowered my head for now.

[You’re so docile now.]

“…What about Bang Eunji?”

‘Seo Dawon’ spoke softly as if he were praising my obedience, but his aura soon changed after I inquired about Bang Eunji.

After a deep, wary silence, he responded in a tone that belied lingering emotions–

[Who knows. What do you think happened to her?]

“…What are you talking about. Don’t tell me–did you do anything to her?”

[I can hear the cogs rolling in your head, Lee-kyung-ah.]

"……"

[Nothing good could have happened to her, of course. I told you, didn't I? I'm going to handcuff you.]

I took a deep breath, trying not to be swayed by 'Seo Dawon's' words.

Though the fake being spoke coldly, I still had yet to receive a failure message from the system. In other words, Bang Eunji, as surprising as it may be, was likely safe. Seo Dawon must have done something to make it difficult for her to find me.

To be frank, I should be nervous about my own safety. This thing imitating the Mage would be of no help to me.

'Will Bang Eunji be able to find me? Before it's too late, I mean…'

I glanced at 'Seo Dawon's' blackened face as I squeezed the handle of the dagger hidden in my skirt. I had no idea why or how the ring took the form of the dagger, but it was a little comforting to have a weapon on hand.

'Of course, it's unclear whether or not this dagger can hurt or affect 'Seo Dawon'…'

Humans wouldn't get scared just because a hamster threatened them with a toothpick, after all. Though this metaphor was a bit humiliating, I couldn't deny reality.

Still, it crossed my mind that 'Seo Dawon' would be careless and underestimate me due to the size of my body. I don't know exactly what he was–and I doubted he was human, but…

'In any case… I can still communicate with him… right?'

He was obsessed with me. Though I wasn't sure why. I decided to ask the questions I had been dying to ask. "Seo Dawon."

[Yeah, Lee-kyung-ah.]

“You and I… we met in a past [Vengeful Ghost Memory], right?”

I had asked without any great expectations as to his answer. At that moment, though, where the mouth should be on ‘Seo Dawon’s’ blackened face tore into a wide simulacrum of a smile.

That sight would make anyone scream. The red interior beyond that pitch-dark face… The uncanny, human-like grin…

[Hmm, I wonder what instances you’re referring to…]

“……”

[We’ve met more than once, Lee-kyung-ah.]

With that smile still on his face, he affirmed my hypothesis. And, he stroked my head as if he were praising me.

The ‘mouth’ that formed did not disappear and remained on its previously featureless, pure-black face. After the mouth formed, ‘Seo Dawon’s’ face kept wriggling and stretching, as if something–other features–were still being formed…

‘Disgusting…’

It was hard to continue to look at that wriggling mass of a face.

However, regardless of my reaction, the being continued to talk to me pleasantly, continuing to imitate Seo Dawon.

[Hmm… Still, you noticed it quite quickly, this time… Judging by your fear, it seems like the façade I wear isn’t working anymore…]

“……”

[In any case, to think you’d remember the ‘me’ you met in the past… Hoo~… I’m glad. I thought…you had completely… forgotten.]

‘What’s he talking about now…?’

I wanted to dig into the story in more detail, but ‘Seo Dawon’ took the initiative to stroke both my cheeks with his hands.

Then, after saying something strange, something changed about his touch. Should I describe his touch like an ice-cold corpse stroking my cheek?

That strange sensation sent goosebumps rising all over my skin. Though I tried to continue speaking, I couldn’t say anything; my jaw had tensed unwittingly.

Furthermore, a strange ‘laughter’ flowed from what I assumed was ‘Seo Dawon’s’ lips. Even more goosebumps rose; it felt as if I had found a huge insect clinging to the corner of my ceiling. As if the insect’s head had turned to look at me while I was observing it. My breath caught in my throat.

[Kek… Kekek…. Gigigigik…..]

“……”

[Kikik… Gigigik…. Kek…. Gigik…]

I tried to ignore those sounds but failed.

When I’ve occasionally fallen prey to sleep paralysis, I was loathe to look in a certain direction because I was scared to see if anything was pressing down on my chest.

This was the same: I trembled without raising my head because of the bizarre fear I felt since ‘Seo Dawon’s’ face had begun to waver. It felt as if something terrifying was happening–as if something was looking down at me from above.

When I closed my eyes tightly–unwilling to confirm my vague fears–‘he’ unfortunately lifted my chin with his fingertips.

I came face to face with a spinning, pitch-black face.

In the end, I had to watch as, right before my nose, the monster's face began to tilt until the head reached the shoulder. Accompanied by a horrible crunching sound, its eyes were now where its chin should be; the face's position was inverted vertically.

Furthermore, the face began to laugh and smile grotesquely, as if it were told to grin with all its might. The wide-open eyes and the corners of his lips were pulled together; if I were to take the expression separately, I would assume that the smile was some punishment given to a sinner in inferno.

These weren't even Seo Dawon's features anymore. Against the backdrop of a black canvas, its eyes, wide-open grin, and sharp, jagged teeth kept turning and spinning around… I couldn't find any words to express this sight except for 'terrifying.'

"Ah…."

When you're too scared, you can't even scream.

I released a long groan and trembled helplessly; this was the scariest thing I had ever seen. I wanted to close my eyes, but I couldn't–I was afraid the face would come closer if I did close them.

My fright seemed to bring great pleasure to that 'thing,' whose form couldn't honestly be said to resemble a human anymore.

It continued to giggle mockingly at me.

[Oh my, it seems like, you're scared, was this, not a face, you liked?]

"……"

[Hmmmm…. Kehehehehe… Kikikeke… Hihihihi…]

'Insane…'

I tried to say something, but when its mouth opened and its chin began to clatter up and down, all my thoughts flew away.

It leaned towards me like that, as if it were going to chew and swallow me up.

[YoushouldhaverunawayLee-kyung-ah,hm?No–let’sbetogether.Youwantedmylovetoo,right?Pleasestayasleeplikethis–Don’t wakeup.Youcandoanythingyou’dlike here;Let’sdreamtogether.Let’shaveadreamyoucan’twakeupfrom.Don’ttrytoescape,andgiveup.No–youdon’twanttodie–youknowthe truth.You’rerunningfromthedreams–don’tignoreyourhunch.Whydon’tyoustillrealizeI’mkillingyou?]

It quickly muttered at me, using the Mage’s voice. The rapid sentences almost sounded recorded.

It spoke so fast that I didn’t understand half of what it said, but it was clear that it would soon do something terrible to me. Its grip on my body was getting stronger. If I stay in its grasp, I may burst within its hands and die.

‘If I lose consciousness here, it’s all over…’

I held back my nausea and bit my lips until it bled. Then, I thrust [Sylph’s Fall], hidden in my skirt, into its thumb.

Then, its grip weakened a little…a pause that may be caused by the prick of a small thorn. However, I didn’t give up and placed more strength into thrusting [Sylph’s Fall].

At that moment, its spinning face stopped. It now screamed with a terrible voice I hadn’t heard before, no longer imitating ‘Seo Dawon’s’ voice.

[Ahhhhrgh!]

It sounded as if countless people were screaming simultaneously.

After that, black smoke rose from [Sylph’s Fall]’s blade. I felt as if I was going to vomit from the disgusting scent that wafted near my nostrils.

However, my hands did not release their tension.

It tried to reach out with its other hand to grab my head–perhaps the blade was actually painful. But, strangely enough, it started and stopped several times.

Then, I saw that the wound site on the thumb had gradually hardened to a gray mass before crumbling away.

Finally, I felt as if I could breathe again–

[The sweet dream is over.]

–But, I could not relax when I heard its murmur from its still grotesquely-bent head alongside its half-demolished hand.

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TL: Gee, I hope you guys love horror D:

Because I was certainly horrified as I was translating this.

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Chapter 326

Chapter 326

With one arm now rendered useless, the monster glared at me as it breathed roughly. I was scared that it might suddenly rush at me, but I didn’t intend to let it continue hurting me.

When I lifted [Sylph’s Fall] and brandished the blade, its momentum slowed. Its hand was lost; my previous attack seemed to have dealt a severe blow.

“Get away from me!” I shouted with all my might, swinging the dagger from side to side.

The monster then tried to copy Seo Dawon’s face once more, with its head rippling. But when I saw that, I shouted even louder, “Argh! Stop trying to imitate him!”

Only then did the quivering features calm down. However, I couldn’t rest on my laurels.

The monster paused for a moment before suddenly opening its mouth wide. Its open mouth was vast–as if there were a passage behind it that exceeded the bounds of its face; the situation was so bizarre I had almost forgotten the urgency of my circumstances and stared blankly at it.

Furthermore, there was something inside the monster’s mouth, wriggling grossly. Goosebumps naturally rose all over my skin.

“What on earth is that…” The subtle light that leaked from [Sylph’s Fall] allowed me to just barely see inside. The mouth appeared as if it were crammed full of something that looked like elongated, haphazardly tangled threads.

I mumbled to myself, hoping that my guess was wrong, “…Snakes?”

[Kyaaaaaaaaaaghh!]

Unfortunately though, as soon I finished mumbling, the snakes opened their bright yellow eyes in unison.

The countless snakes raised their heads simultaneously and began to approach me. I faltered and retreated; when the snakes began to speed up, I screamed. “AHHHHHHH!”

I ran towards the corner of the room, but I couldn’t outrun the snakes that continued to pour out of his mouth like a waterfall. There was nothing for me to climb, either.

“Haah, haah….” Eventually, after being driven into the corner, I leaned my back against the wall and, once more, gripped [Sylph’s Fall] tightly.

Before I knew it, the black snakes had surrounded me, hissing and making all sorts of unpleasant sounds. However, they could only threaten me with their poised heads; perhaps they were cautious of [Sylph’s Fall].

‘What should I do…?!’

[Stupid Hamster!]

Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice ring from the ceiling.

Startled, I looked up; a cat covered in cute pink fur stood, shouting over a hole she had pierced through with her claws.

“Bang Eunji!” Though I was relieved by her appearance, I still grimaced as I couldn’t reach her from my spot, surrounded by snakes.

Silly of me to think that, however; Bang Eunji jumped straight down as soon as we made eye contact. She gracefully trampled the snakes' heads. A jaw-dropping landing.

[Ke-e-e-e-ek!]

Of course, the snakes didn't stay still. Posing with its poisonous, black fangs outwards, they tried to snap at the young girl's heels. Bang Eunji was faster, though.

The pink cat approached me, stomping on the snake's heads and torsos and avoiding their attacks with fluid, seamless movements–I wanted to ask how she could dodge without even seeing the attacks. The snakes actually bit each other while trying to attack Bang Eunji, and twisted their bodies into a tangled mass.

[What are you doing, staring so vacantly like that!]

Thanks to Bang Eunji creating pandemonium (?), the snakes were shaken; their formation was disrupted. There was space for me to move. As soon as she shouted, I ran towards her, brandishing [Sylph's Fall] wildly.

When the snakes faltered and created some space, Ban Eunji leaped high into the air before landing near me; she bit me painlessly on the scruff of the neck and leaped once more.

I could hear a furious hissing sound coming from behind, but even that noise calmed down after a few jumps. We had escaped from that bloody, death-trap of a room.

"…H-How did you get here? Also, what's with that appearance?"

[It's not the time to ask that. We need to run quickly to a place where we can sign the contract…]

As I listened to her, a sudden thought forced my mouth open, "You can't do anything even though this is your [Vengeful Ghost Memory]?"

An unexpected response fell from her lips–

[Those guys… Eunji can’t get rid of them because they’re connected to Hamster-ssi.]

“What?”

[Why are you surprised? Hamster-ssi brought them all inside.]

“No… What do you mean by that? I don’t have anything to do with that guy! Rather, it’s chasing me one-sidedly–and it’s not like we share a body.”

[Hmmm.]

But, Bang Eunji didn’t seem to be interested in my argument. She looked at me as if she had not an ounce of conviction in my statements–as if she found all this troublesome. She tilted her head and said–

[But, from Eunji’s perspective, they all look similar to Hamster-ssi.]

“What? What are you saying! Those things look like snakes, don’t they?”

[Eunji isn’t talking about one’s outer appearance. Eunji looks like a cat right now, right?]

“Then…”

[If you don’t understand, Eunji doesn’t particularly want to explain. Eunji doesn’t think you’ll understand even if she explains.]

“What?”

[More than that, there’s no time to explain and it’s…exhausting.]

“W-Wait a minute… What am I supposed to do when you’re being so evasive…!”

However, instead of answering, Bang Eunji kept walking, still biting my scruff, and ignoring my complaints.

I tried to organize my complicated thoughts using what she had said. That monster was trying to trap me in these [Vengeful Ghost Memories] by imitating Seo Dawon. Furthermore, Bang Eunji stated that the monster and I were connected. Therefore, she couldn't get rid of him…

"…You're saying I'm just like that monster?" I grumbled, not bothering to hide my displeasure. Then, Bang Eunji made a tactless remark–

[You're similar.]

"What exactly makes us so similar!"

[The obsession with Guildmaster-nim…]

"What?" I looked at her, surprised by her unexpected response. However, Bang Eunji only calmly looked around at our surroundings, as if she hadn't dropped a bomb on me.

[Hmm… Will this place be okay? Hamster-ssi, please take out the contract.]

"……" There were one or two more things I wanted to argue, but I couldn't afford to air all my grievances now. I suppressed my complaints; the contract came first.

Staring at my deeply displeased face, she licked her paws languidly–despicably. Then, she placed her paw–still damp and scented from her spit–on my head, patting and stroking my hair.

[Hamster-ssi. No matter how kindhearted you may be, it's not healthy to be obsessed.]

I took out the contract, floated it in front of me, and looked back at the cat. I still didn't understand what she had meant–before and now–but I felt choked up for some reason. "…I said I don't know. I've never made anything like that. That thing always gets in my way."

[……]

"Moreover, what 'obsession' are you talking about…"

This time, Bang Eunji didn’t even pretend to listen to my complaints; she merely placed her paw on the contract–right where she should sign her name. I frowned but also added my own signature; it was better to finalize this contract anyway.

[Ooooooo—-]

As soon as we were finished signing, a long, terrible roar echoed bitterly from where we fled.

I looked back; a strange mood washed over me. However, a sharp tongue licked the back of my head, and I was forced to turn around and look at Bang Eunji again. “W-What was that!”

[Hamster-ssi. You haven’t forgotten our other contract, have you? Regarding Eunji and Garam-kun’s future.]

Actually, I had forgotten a little–a needle of guilt poked my heart. But, when Bang Eunji squinted her eyes, I nodded hastily despite the cold sweat that ran down my back. “O-Of course…”

[Hmm… What an untrustworthy expression…]

As she spoke, Bang Eunji pressed my cheeks with her soft, jelly-like paw pads. It seemed that this was one way she expressed familiarity, so I didn’t want to push her away. Suddenly, her body began to slowly shine.

We raised our heads as one; then, light rose spread and unfurled from our feet. Fortunately, it seemed our contract had been completed properly.

“Haah…” I really thought this was my biggest ordeal yet. I couldn’t help the sigh that tumbled out of my lips.

Still, I felt as if I had completed my trial successfully. The relief that I had done well made all strength seep out of my body. Meanwhile, the light continued to rise until it reached a point where I found that it was no longer possible to open my eyes.

But, just before I closed my eyes, I saw something black and gargantuan collapse over the horizon as it tried to rush towards me. I tried to open my eyes again to see what it was, but…

[Once again–don't be too obsessive.]

I shut my eyes tight, flinching at Bang Eunji's firm words.

Just like that, we were plunged into white.

"…Hagh!" I stood up, breathless.

But…

"…W-What happened?"

When I opened my eyes, I was greeted by chaos in my home.

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TL: Sometimes Bang Eunji uses strange words, so I wonder if 'obsession' is what she meant here. Either way, It's interesting to learn that Bang Eunji can't control these Vengeful Ghost Memories.

Also, I mentioned this in the discord, but I'm going on a break guys for next week. To take care of the new cat and myself >.<

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Chapter 327

Chapter 327

T.W. Gore

The chilly air hit me first.

The air in the house was cold enough to suck the heat out of my body, as if the heating had been turned off for quite some time. That wasn't all–when I looked out of the window, I could only see a shining moon. Perhaps the sun had already set.

I could clearly see the disrupted state of the room through the large window, but that didn't mean I understood this situation. I had completed these [Vengeful Ghost Contracts] several times, but I had not once woken up to this.

Above all…

'…Have the servants ever left me alone like this?'

An ominous feeling swept over me, so I stumbled to my feet. But, soon, I felt a sharp headache and fell back onto the bed.

"Nngh…"

Yet again, I seemed to be hampered by a rapid decline in physical health following each [Vengeful Ghost Contract].

Clank, Crash–!

"……!"

The walls of the house shook; I heard something in the living room shattering.

I was so startled I momentarily forgot about my headache and propped myself up. There was something strange happening, and I suspected I wasn't alone in the house.

'Are the servants gathered in the living room?'

I swallowed dryly and leaned towards where the living room should be, trying to listen for any stray noises. At the same time, I looked around the room I woke up in…This time, with an eye for detail.

"What the…"

I didn't notice earlier because I was distracted, but when I scrutinized my surroundings, my sense of disharmony and unease grew.

First things first: the light on the ceiling was half-broken with the inside mechanisms clearly visible. The door was cracked, and about a quarter of the wood was torn off.

When I peered through the gap into the living room, I could see that the decorative cabinet that Lackey liked was smashed and flipped upside down. When I saw that, I felt that the situation was more unusual than I first presumed.

That dresser was very big and heavy; on top of that, Lackey enjoyed playing inside the drawers, so I purposefully fixed it to the wall. The fact that the dresser was overturned meant that something with the power of a strong earthquake must have come through.

However, the large window connecting the living room and the terrace was still intact. Come to think of it, the deafening crash I heard earlier was quite strange as well.

Eventually, the name of the person who could quell my anxiety popped out of my mouth, "[Seo Dawon]."

"……"

"[Seo Dawon]…?"

However, the Mage did not materialize even though I had called his name several times.

I despaired for a moment but tried to stay calm as I turned on the system notification window. There must be a reason why I couldn't summon the Mage.

And, as I expected, I had received an alert informing me that summoning was currently impossible. The system gave me an incomprehensible explanation for the cause.

[You are unable to summon your Servants at this time.]

[You are currently exposed to a powerful debuff cast by a High Priest.]

[There is a 'Location Hunt' curse targeting you and this location. This will last for the next 22 hours, 38 minutes, and 12 seconds.]

[It seems you have curried the hate of an enemy that is effective against your attribute…]

[Hopefully, this will not be our last piece of advice, but if you regain consciousness, we recommend you leave this place quickly.] [1]

"…What?"

Boom–!

As soon as I checked the system messages, I heard a tremendous boom, and the whole house began to shake.

I lost my balance and collapsed; I quickly raised my head, but a light–so bright I could not open my eyes–burst into the living room. I was blinded as if my face had been hit by a flashlight's gleam.

However, that wasn’t the problem

“Choi Lee-kyung…”

“……!”

A voice that should not have been heard came from beyond the door.

It was Bae Jaemin.

“……” I stumbled back instinctively. However, the sounds of the footsteps became slowly but surely louder.

Standing in front of the door, Bae Jaemin cast a long shadow. From my perspective, I could not see what sort of expression he was making due to the white light in his hand. However, my hair stood on end from the intense bloodthirst I could feel from beyond the door.

My teeth clattered from fear; Bae Jaemin asked me from beyond the broken door, “Where is Ryu Hyerin?”

“……!”

When I gave no response, Bae Jaemin reached out through the cracks in the broken door. Where his hand touched, the thick wooden door began to crumble and fall apart like dust.

After the door fell away, Bae Jaemin slowly approached me. The wreckage underneath his sneakers shrieked–crunching and breaking. “Why aren’t you answering?”

“……”

“She’s still alive, right? We’ll need to negotiate, after all.”

“……”

I looked up at the Priest–once again, no answers given.

He stared back through disheveled hair, his usual eyepatch discarded. For the first time, I could see that eye. The bones supporting the eyeball had sunken in; the socket strangely resembled an empty skull.

However, that wasn't the only thing that startled me. He had chapped lips and a rough beard… As if he had been wandering alone for several days.

"Answer me!" As soon as Bae Jaemin noticed me observing him, he grimaced unpleasantly and slammed his fist into the wall. As soon as his fist touched the wall, the material crumpled before his might.

When I saw him, I realized he couldn't control himself because he was such a nervous wreck. To my surprise, even a shameless, horrible person like him held someone dear.

"Obviously… She's dead. She did something to deserve death."

"……"

"You…must have expected that, right? That's why you're like this…" I was overwhelmed by intense emotions and cursed like never before at Bae Jaemin.

To be honest, if I wanted to escape this situation, I should have bought time by lying and claiming Ryu Hyerin was alive… However, when I saw Bae Jaemin's teary eyes, I couldn't hold back.

"…Hilarious. You did…You did something like that, and still…" I said.

"……"

"Did you think you'd have a 'happily ever after'? Seriously? You trash bastard…"

As soon as I finished speaking, Bae Jaemin's expression scarily disappeared; his face blanched. His lips opened for a moment, but no sound came out…As if he had forgotten to breathe.

I couldn’t insult him anymore. Though the Priest said nothing, a terrible, suffocating aura emanated from him.

He lowered his head, an incomprehensible emotion plaguing his face. Bloodthirst continued to pour out.

However, he soon stumbled over to me slowly, one step at a time. Then, he slowly bent down on one knee.

I closed my eyes tightly as Bae Jaemin reached out. Unexpectedly, there was no pain; it felt as if his cold fingertips were gently caressing my cheek.

Of course, that tenderness only lasted for a brief moment. I screamed as terrible pain bloomed–as if my left eye had caught on fire. “Arrghhh!”

The smell of burning flesh accompanied by losing one’s vision on one side came as a huge shock. I scratched at Bae Jaemin’s arm in an attempt to free myself, but Bae Jaemin kept holding his hand there… Until he removed something steaming hot from my head.

I crawled on the ground to run away from the Priest. However, Bae Jaemin’s loud and melodious voice reached my ears.

“[Holy Repair].”

“Ahhhhhh!!!”

Simultaneously, even worse pain bloomed where my eye had been. It was as if something was embedded into my brain and grew while absorbing everything around it, sucking all the moisture into the socket.

It continued to expand, scraping all the way down to my brain. Unable to bear the pain, I tried to scratch a hole into my eyes with my fingers, but my attempt failed as the Priest stepped on my arm.

Bae Jaemin smiled cruelly as he looked down at me, who was foaming at the mouth. “If I pluck and regrow it several times, I’m sure you’ll go crazy quickly…”

“Nnngh…”

“I’m looking forward to it–to see how much you can endure.”

Become a Patron!

TL: There’s a lot we could talk about: the system’s weird af sentience, Lee-kyung’s honestly amazing talk backs to Bae Jaemin, and the horrifying torture that is plucking and regrowing someone’s eye….but…

…Oh my god, Lackey is so baby. Playing in dresser drawers sounds exactly like something my kittens would do.

Footnotes

1. I’m using the royal ‘we’ for the system…partially bc I can’t tell if this is a singular entity or a hive mind or something…

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Chapter 328

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Bang Bang Bang–!

Just then, there were heavy knocks on the door. Bae Jaemin, still holding onto me, raised his head. Unlike before, his face was lined with tension and questions.

“…–nim! Lee-kyung-nim! Are you there?”

The voice belonged to Kim Sangyoon. The issue, though, was that Bae Jaemin also recognized the owner of that voice.

“…Mmngh!”

“That’s right… Kim Sangyoon is also involved somehow, right?” Bae Jaemin whispered, covering my mouth.

Looking at his cruel expression, I desperately tried to signal to the Warrior that he was in danger, but it was futile since I couldn’t even breathe properly due to the Priest strangling me.

Meanwhile, Kim Sangoon eventually entered the house; dull footsteps–which must be his–approached closer and closer.

Desperate, I bit at the Priest's hand covering my mouth until it bled. Bae Jaemin languidly looked at me before gently pulling his hand away. The man had a relaxed demeanor, as if he were watching a bug struggling to survive. However, I had no other options available to me.

As I felt that iron-tasting blood dripping down my throat, I screamed, "Don't…Come…!"

"…Are you there?"

However, contrary to the desperation within my heart, only hoarse, broken words tumbled out of my mouth. However, I didn't give up and tried to make whatever sound I could, banging at the floor with my fist and pushing at a broken light bulb with my feet.

However, my desperate struggles only resulted in a few quiet noises. Bae Jaemin, who looked down at me for a while, pressed on my Adam's apple with his thumb; that alone extinguished my futile rebellion.

"It seems you're quite close to Kim Sangyoon. You're not even asking me to spare your life; you simply want him to run away."

"……"

"Would it be a worthwhile show if I were to tear Kim Sangyoon to death right in front of you?" Bae Jaemin muttered, as if he were eager to do so. When I heard those words, I felt as if I had made a mistake; it felt as if all the blood drained out of my body.

I didn't want to cry, but my view became gradually blurred due to the overwhelming emotions surging inside of me. When he saw my face, the Priest smiled.

And, just then, the approaching footsteps stopped. Finally, Kim Sangyoon had spotted us.

"Lee-kyung-nim!" Kim Sangyoon shouted, eyes wide open.

“You came to find Choi Lee-kyung?” Bae Jaemin asked softly; the priest grabbed my head and tilted it upwards so Kim Sangyoon could see my face clearly.

“What are you doing?!” The Warrior immediately took out [Berserker] and aimed the blade at Bae Jaemin. However, Bae Jaemin laughed without even a hint of anxiety in his voice, “Is your head an ornament?”

“…What?”

“What I’m doing with Choi Lee-kyung here… Why I’m here at all…I’m sure you can make an educated guess.”

“……!”

“Though, thinking about it, you must have also done something unforgivable if you’re hanging around the likes of Choi Lee-kyung.”

Kim Sangyoon’s expression distorted. However, the Warrior looked at me with a calmer expression than I would have expected from him. His eyes roamed over my face, and, when he saw my black-and-blue bruised neck, his brows furrowed.

He lowered [Berserker] slightly before calmly stating, “Bae Jaemin… Even if it’s you, it’s still a felony to assault a User without a trial.”

“Ha ha. I don’t think that’s anything the people who kidnapped and murdered Hyerin-ie should say.”

Hearing that, Kim Sangyoon looked at me, startled; I responded by continuing to signal, with my eyes, that he should run away.

But, of course, Kim Sangyoon didn’t receive my signal. He lowered his voice and spoke as if he were trying to somehow persuade the Priest. “How could Choi Lee-kyung deal with Ryu Hyerin? He’s even lower level than me. You should forget a ridiculous conspiracy theory like that…”

“Ah, by the way. Choi Lee-kyung already flapped his mouth about that. What are you going to do now?”

"……"

"For your information, Choi Lee-kyung has been very cooperative… Your name popped up immediately as well." Bae Jaemin didn't listen to the Warrior and continued to speak. Meanwhile, he strangled my throat so I couldn't even deny the allegations; nausea welled up within me.

I had never sold out Kim Sangyoon. However, I had no power to shake off Bae Jaemin and could only open and close my mouth silently.

Kim Sangyoon, unaware of the complete situation, looked between me and the Priest with a complicated expression. Eventually, he lowered [Berserker] and stared at Bae Jaemin.

"I…there were circumstances." The Warrior mumbled–his demeanor a bit servile. Perhaps Bae Jaemin was satisfied with that response; he smirked and relaxed his grip on my throat. Then, as if I were garbage, he threw me to the floor.

"Cough, hack…" I wanted to move, but as soon as I was flung away, I was immediately caught by the Priest again. He stepped on my chest, pressing down, and I could only spit out a dry cough.

He didn't stop at brutally trampling me beneath his feet; he began to stomp on me several times. The sounds of my ribs breaking could be clearly heard throughout the house because the surroundings were so quiet.

I wanted to scream from the terrible pain, but I could only make breathless noises–I blamed the fact that I had been strangled just before. Kim Sangyoon turned his head and looked away as if he were scared.

After assaulting me, Bae Jaemin continued in a relaxed tone. "Really? Choi Lee-kyung sold you out, saying that he couldn't have done it without your help."

"…I was forced to act against my will due to some restraints…"

"Didn't you say that Choi Lee-kyung is lower level than you?"

“The person who helped…Nngh! That’s all I can say.” With that said, Kim Sangyoon opened his mouth and showed its insides to the Priest. A complex pattern appeared–like a tattoo on his tongue before fading away.

After seeing that, Bae Jaemin rubbed his chin and murmured, “That’s the highest level prohibition spell used by Sorcerers…”

“……”

“Alright. Then, Kim Sangyoon. You just sit still and blink if I’m wrong.”

“……”

“Did Seo Dawon intervene?”

“……” Kim Sang-yoon was stiff; there was no movement.

Bae Jaemin received that signal, sighed, and murmured, “So, it was really Seo Dawon? Hah…”

“……”

“Then, Ryu Hyerin… Truly…” Talking to himself, Bae Jaemin closed his bloodshot eyes. Then…

Slam–!

“Co-ough…!”

He kicked me in the stomach once more, as if he were venting his fury. I shook from the sharp pain. Soon, I heard Bae Jaemin’s cold voice from above my head.

“[Healing].”

“Mm–Mmmnph!”

I was sure that was a healing skill, but, when my body was engulfed by light, I was wracked with incomparable pain.

My mouth couldn’t help but drool; I felt sharp pain, as if someone was stabbing my organs. My fingernails cracked into pieces as I struggled and scratched at the floor. However, the pain didn’t subside at all.

Soon, the light died down; the pain disappeared as my shattered organs recovered. I sobbed and burrowed my face into my arms. And…

“Seo Dawon won’t die twice just because I’ve killed you…” Bae Jaemin said, tapping my shaking body with his foot. I didn’t answer, but he still looked down at me with a thoughtful expression. “You must have revived Seo Dawon with a Necromancer skill, right? Then, can he feel pain?”

“……”

“It would be nice if he could feel pain…”

“……”

“I should look into that.” With that said, Bae Jaemin leaned down and pulled lightly on my outstretched arm… I was so terrified of the Priest, I couldn’t help but scream at even that small amount of contact.

Bae Jaemin laughed and whispered, “I haven’t even started yet.”

Just then–

Suddenly, a thin thread of blood appeared on Bae Jaemin’s cheek. The wound burst, and blood droplets splashed onto my face.

Bae Jaemin looked back and cocked his eyebrow. Simultaneously, he probed the state of the wound on his split cheek, drawing his fingers across it in a line. That gesture alone was all the Priest needed to make the skin on his cheek smooth once more.

However, Bae Jaemin still looked displeased. He flung my arm away, slowly turned around, and murmured slowly, “Are you joking with me?”

“…Haah…. Fuck.” Kim Sangyoon, the subject of Bae Jaemin’s glare, stood with cold sweat dripping down his body with [Berserker] in hand.

Become a Patron!

TL: My god Bae Jaemin, why are you so obsessed with Seo Dawon?

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Chapter 329

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“Are you insane…” Bae Jaemin seemed angrier that Kim Sangyoon dared to ambush him than because of the wound the Warrior inflicted.

Kim Sangyoon must have noticed that as well; with a smile, he stated, “If I aimed one… just one centimeter higher, I could have done away with his other eye…”

Of course, he still stuttered out of fear while saying something so outlandish.

Bae Jaemin raised his head; his fist clenched so tight that his knuckles stood out in stark contrast against the rest of his skin. Perhaps he was affected by Kim Sangyoon’s attitude.

Suddenly, a shimmering circle of light appeared above Bae Jaemin’s head, reminiscent of the radiance that appeared before a High Priest activated their skill. However, despite its holy appearance, an overwhelming bloodlust overflowed from Bae Jaemin’s entire body–enough to give anyone goosebumps. “If you’ve only messed with me because you trust Seo Dawon, then you’re truly a fool.”

“…Fucker. Who’s the real fool?” Kim Sangyoon replied, not backing down. After spitting on the ground stoically, he fixed his grip on [Berserker]. His posture indicated he wanted to try and fight.

I thought that fighting would be foolhardy, but when I saw his knees shaking slightly, my breath caught in my throat. He knew as well–he knew that the victor had already been decided.

Nevertheless, he risked his life to stall for time. After all, I would have died if Kim Sangyoon hadn’t stepped up.

“Don’t…!”

“[Fléchette].” [1]

Thwack–!

However, even if Kim Sangyoon acted out on my behalf, my death would only be postponed by a few minutes. I tried to stop the Warrior–it would behoove him to run away, but the Priest triggered his skill first.

Bae Jaemin flicked his finger; dozens of white rings appeared over Kim Sangyoon’s head. They soon shot round beams of lights–like lasers–at him.

Boom–!

The slender lances of light caused tremendous vibrations and created acrid smoke wherever they touched after the Warrior dodged its path. The marble was smashed; it looked as if each pillar of light caused a mini-explosion.

The attacks continued without giving the Warrior even a second to breathe.

“Fuuuckk!” Fortunately, and surprisingly, Kim Sangyoon avoided the aggressive outpour of attacks. Of course, he didn’t make it seem easy, but the man avoided all the light with minimal movement and without losing his balance. He had even avoided the difficult time-delay attacks as well.

Kim Sangyoon gradually narrowed the distance between him and the Priest, swearing and shouting all the way. Then, dodging the last attack, he abnormally positioned his body half-a-turn in the Priest’s direction and used a skill, aiming for Bae Jaemin’s blindspot.

“[One Hit Kill]!” [2]

“……!”

Screeech–!

Even I, who was watching with bated breath, was taken aback by his unconventional movement. However, Bae Jaemin reacted with a terrifying speed and created a transparent barrier to block Kim Sang-yoon’s attack.

When the barrier of light and Kim Sangyoon’s [Berserker] collided, a large metallic screech rang out. Bae Jaemin glared at the Warrior from beyond the barrier and said irritably, “Did you get trained by Seo Dawon?”

“Shut up! I didn’t learn anything from him!” After shouting, Kim Sangyoon glanced at me with a faintly annoyed look, but…

Anyways, I was surprised to see that Kim Sangyoon’s competence was higher than I had previously thought. I knew that he was originally better than me, but his movements were now agile enough to vaguely remind me of Jung Garam.

The lines of Bae Jaemin’s face deepened at Kim Sangyoon’s response. It seemed as if the Priest just couldn’t comprehend his reasoning. “I didn’t

think you had such a good relationship with Seo Dawon.. Why are you trying to come after me?”

“…….” Kim Sangyoon didn’t answer, but Bae Jaemin didn’t appear as if he had expected one.

However, the Priest suddenly turned around and glanced at my face. And, Kim Sangyoon, who had been paying close attention to the Priest’s behavior, spoke loudly…as if he were trying to attract the Priest’s attention. “Y-You don’t want to support me anyway, because of Ahn Joo-sung!”

Bae Jaemin looked at Kim Sangyoon for a moment before smirking, “So, you’re standing here because of how you’ve been treated…? Then, I’ll give you HaHae’s deputy guildmaster seat if you cut off Choi Lee-kyung’s legs here.”

“……”

“It’s better than following a corpse whose resurrection may or may not come.”

“……”

When Kim Sangyoon couldn’t answer him, Bae Jaemin laughed, “Haha… Why are you trying to think so hard? You’re not even an intelligent enough bastard to do that?”

Bae Jaemin took a step closer to me. Kim Sangyoon spoke urgently, no longer pretending to be calm, “You son of a bitch! You don’t have the confidence to beat me? You’re number one in the rankings!”

“Why would I take the long way when I can take the easy path?” Laughing, Bae Jaemin opened his inventory and slowly pulled out his own weapon–a staff. His expression was so cruel–like a criminal pulling a sword from its sheath.

I bit my lips–to the point of bleeding–in order to stop the groans that threatened to leave my mouth. And, when Bae Jaemin completely turned

away from Kim Sangyoon to look at me…

“[Seizing Blow]!” [3]

Clank–!

The barrier of light was smashed in one hit, like a window pane. Kim Sangyoon had succeeded in breaking the skill with pure physical strength!

Numerous broken shards poured down over Bae Jaemin’s back. Then, as the Priest had yet to turn around, Kim Sangyoon spread his arms wide and swung his sword at the Priest’s neck.

“…Cough…”

“Honestly, you play with them a little, and suddenly they think they’re on the same level,” Bae Jaemin muttered.

Just before Kim Sangyoon’s sword touched Bae Jaemin’s neck, the Priest avoided the attack at lightspeed. Then, he dove into Kim Sangyoon’s arms, and from my perspective, it looked like they were hugging each other.

However, soon after, Kim Sangyoon vomited blood, and his sword helplessly dropped to the ground. His slow collapse, still holding onto Bae Jaemin, took almost five seconds.

I was shocked and belatedly realized, after seeing Bae Jaemin’s white hand penetrate through the Warrior’s back, what had happened. The Priest had stabbed Kim Sangyoon’s stomach with his bare hand.

“N….o….” I clumsily staggered towards the pair, but Bae Jaemin immediately pulled his hand out and pushed the Warrior away with his fingertips. Eyes widened, Kim Sangyoon toppled over without any resistance.

After falling backwards with a thump, a pool of blood began to spread from Kim Sangyoon's back. The dark red blood also began to flow down the sides from his stomach.

"In about a minute, he'll probably go into shock from excessive blood loss," Bae Jaemin whispered joyfully as he looked at my panicked face.

After listening to those words, I placed some strength into my trembling arms and tried to approach Kim Sangyoon.

However, Bae Jaemin stubbornly blocked my way. He even stepped on one of my hands and stomped down. I knew that a bone had broken, but I couldn't even scream. Even though I was in terrible pain, I could only see the afterimages of Kim Sangyoon crumpling to the ground and remaining motionless.

"Mo…ve…" I tapped at Bae Jaemin's foot while crying. But, he merely looked down at me with a grin on his face.

Bae Jaemin rubbed his hands, dirtied from Kim Sangyoon's blood, on my hair and asked with a delighted expression, "So, what's the relationship between the two of you? Are you two gay or something?"

"……"

"Urk, so disgusting. I got his blood on my hands…Tsk, he isn't diseased, right?"

"……"

My pleas–my desperate begs–got stuck in my throat. I looked up at the Priest vacantly.

He giggled, "You know very well that I'm the only one who can save Kim Sangyoon here."

"……"

“What should I do? I’d love to rip you and that piggy apart, but… It’s a little too easy of an ending for both of you…”

“……”

Meanwhile, Bae Jaemin raised the foot that had been on the back of my hand and tapped my mouth with the tip of his shoe. “You need to be proactive for it to be fun.”

“……” I stared at Bae Jaemin’s boots stained with blood, lowered my head, and slowly opened my mouth.

Honestly, I didn’t think that licking his shoes would make Bae Jaemin spare Kim Sangyoon. However, being weighed down by the burden of my own helplessness was even more painful.

Just before my tongue touched the tip of his shoes…

[Grrr….]

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: No T_T Kim Sangyoon T_T

Footnotes

1. French for ‘little arrow’ or dart.
2. In martial arts (and honestly mostly martial arts novels) this phrase refers to a technique or skill in which a practitioner can deliver a powerful strike or blow that is capable of incapacitating or defeating an opponent with a single hit.
3. ( ) is a martial arts technique that aims to quickly incapacitate or neutralize an opponent, often through a surprise attack to a vulnerable point of the body.

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Chapter 330

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The Priest reacted faster than I did; he quickly turned around and asked, “What was that?”

Subsequently, Bae Jaemin made a bewildered noise. I did the same as well. It definitely had been less than one minute since I took my eyes off the Warrior, but the space where his body should have been was now vacant.

Even the puddle of blood had cleanly disappeared. If not for the fishy scent of blood that lingered in my nose, it would have been hard to believe that Kim Sangyoon had suffered a fatal injury mere moments ago.

[Grrrrk….]

Just then, above my head, I heard a sound–like a beast crying out.

Bae Jaemin reacted instantly and raised both arms over his head, but some unknown entity scratched his arms before retreating. Bae Jaemin staggered and lowered his hands; the prosthetic arm was crushed completely. His intact arm was injured enough to bleed through his clothes.

“…Kim Sangyoon?” However, Bae Jaemin seemed more surprised by who attacked him rather than his injuries.

He opened his sole eye wide as he looked at a corner of the ceiling. I also followed the Priest’s gaze and identified the attacker. “S-Sangyoon-

ssi…?”

There was Kim Sangyoon, supporting his body weight with the strength of his arms pushing against the walls by the ceiling.

However, something was strange.

Kim Sangyoon’s bangs, which he would style every day, were drooping as if they were wet, and his eyes, visible through the gap in the strands of his hair, were glowing red like the other servants’.

Kim Sangyoon was still critically injured. The hole in his abdomen was still there, and some organs could be seen through the gap.

Nevertheless, the Warrior wasn’t bleeding. Of course, that didn’t mean he was completely fine otherwise. His body, which was originally quite built, had become eerily swollen.

His forearms, holding both sides of the ceiling’s corner, were enlarged enough to be twice the size of a normal adult male’s forearms. A beast-like growl kept rumbling from his throat.

Upon closer inspection, his canines were also elongated and protruded sharply out of his mouth. The Warrior drooled as he couldn’t close his lips. That barbaric appearance exuded an unprecedentedly creepy aura.

“…What the hell is that?” Bae Jaemin murmured in a low tone, as if he couldn’t believe that the brute before him was truly Kim Sangyoon.

And as soon as he heard Bae Jaemin’s voice, Kim Sangyoon tilted his head from side to side and made a fierce growling sound. It felt as if he were reacting sensitively to even the Priest’s smallest movements.

“Explain, Choi Lee-kyung,” Bae Jaemin called out.

“……”

Bae Jaemin tapped me with his toes, but I had no idea either.

Just then–

As soon as Bae Jaemin's toes touched me, we suddenly heard a crash–! from the ceiling. Bae Jaemin was pushed back; Kim Sangyoon had kicked off from the ceiling and shot towards Bae Jaemin.

"Haa…. This piggy bastard…!"

[GrahhhhH!]

Bae Jaemin, completely frustrated, used his staff to narrowly prevent the attack from hitting.

Surprisingly though, even when Bae Jaemin grit his teeth and engaged in a power struggle with Kim Sangyoon, it was Bae Jaemin who was slowly losing his balance.

It seemed that Kim Sangyoon's strength increased as much as his muscles swelled. Bae Jaemin's brows furrowed; his face twisted from the humiliation. But, he soon cast a strong buff on himself.

"[**Grant me the power to establish my authority as your servant on this land.**]"

As the buff was cast, Kim Sangyoon seemed to waver for a moment as if he were being pushed back. However, he raised one leg–displaying some incredible flexibility–up from Bae Jaemin's staff, bent his waist, and kicked Bae Jaemin's neck, sending the Priest flying towards the wall with a bone-crunching sound.

Thud–!

Cr-r-rack–!

“Cough…” Accompanied by the awful sound of breaking bones, Bae Jaemin flew to and was stuck inside the wall.

“……” I couldn’t keep my mouth shut at the sight.

Kim Sangyoon even took away the Priest’s staff and threw it into the corner. The Priest vomited blood, but he raised his head. “You…What have you done?”

The Priest’s face was full of astonishment. Even so, he stretched his intact hand out to the side.

Then, the staff that Kim Sangyoon had thrown flew back into Bae Jaemin’s hand. However, Kim Sangyoon did not waver at all and readied his stance.

“…[**Holy Wave**].” Bae Jaemin also quickly responded with another skill.

Something akin to a tsunami of light gently rose from behind him and began to envelop Kim Sangyoon’s torso.

Kim Sangyoon crossed his arms to withstand the attack, but as soon as the light touched his body, it exploded. Both of his arms were soon covered in blood.

“You idiot…Huh?”

Surprisingly, though the wound was deep enough to expose bone, it healed in the blink of an eye.

Bae Jaemin was so surprised he was rendered speechless. Then, as if he had been waiting for this moment, Kim Sangyoon smiled bitterly and struck his fists together.

[Berserker Drive.]

The skill, which must have been triggered by clapping his fists together, caused steam to rise from the Warrior’s entire body.

In that state, Kim Sangyoon jumped high, in place, and rotated 180 degrees. He placed his entire momentum behind one hand, ready to deliver a hefty swing.

Thud–!

And then, the Warrior suddenly appeared in front of the Priest, as if he were using a ‘Blink’ skill. The defenseless Bae Jaemin was struck in the face and rolled onto the floor.

Reflexively holding his hand to his face to stem the nosebleed, Bae Jaemin shouted in surprise, finding it hard to believe that Kim Sangyoon could become so suddenly powerful. “How could you have a skill like that…!”

However, Kim Sangyoon grumbled, smiled, and stretched the muscles in his shoulders. He then lowered his posture once more and rushed in; another one-sided beating followed.

Bae Jaemin shot out a skill to deal with the rushing Warrior. But, though Kim Sangyoon had been in front of the Priest, Kim Sangyoon appeared behind Bae Jaemin and dealt a heavy blow to break his ribs.

Then, he appeared on the right after pretending to attack from the left, slashing across Bae Jaemin’s cheek three or four times. However, when Bae Jaemin tried to fight back, the Warrior appeared in another blindspot. Eventually, the Priest had no choice but to raise a triple shield and retreat a few steps. “Don’t make me laugh… I won’t… Not to a bastard like you…!”

Though Bae Jaemin used his skills to heal all the injuries Kim Sangyoon inflicted, the Priest was dismayed despite his currently favorable situation. His pride had been hit hard, and he seemed to have lost his composure.

He nervously wielded his staff as he floated large-scale skills in every direction. “**[Please cut off the head of the arrogant heretics. Let the grief of the unbelievers be heard. This holy war will always end in your victory. Grant eternal despair to those groaning in hell.]**…!”

Bae Jaemin drew a holy symbol with his fingers from which a wave originated, and a strong wind blew. I protected my broken hand and was pushed back by the sheer force.

However, Kim Sangyoon stood firm; he raised his red eyes and looked at Bae Jaemin without moving a muscle. He gazed at Bae Jaemin as if the Priest was a cornered prey. I could feel a transparent, savage impulse emanating from the Warrior, as if he wanted to pick his opponent apart piece by piece.

Bae Jaemin bit his lips momentarily–he too had felt that bloodlust. However, the Priest seemed more angry than afraid. “You cheeky little…!”

As expected, Bae Jaemin began swinging the staff harder than before, his flourishes fueled by anger. Soon, stronger beams of light burst out than the waves before. The beams gradually began to produce a silhouette of an angel, its holy eyes closed. “[**Angel Bind.**]”

There were a total of four angels, all of them holding chains. They walked slowly around Kim Sangyoon; the chains created a barrier as they weaved in and around each other.

The chains continued to wind around him until a dense network of light, like a net, surrounded Kim Sangyoon. It seemed the Priest had activated a powerful skill that could hold the opponent in place for any future attacks. The Warrior also lowered his stance, letting out a long, low groan…he must have felt the unusual aura.

[Grr….]

At that moment.

Shockingly, Kim Sangyoon began digging at his exposed, unhealed stomach. I heard the gruesome sound of flesh tearing apart; the smell of blood became even denser.

[Berserker Drive, Mode Two.]

As if everything before had been nothing but a warm-up, pitch-black tribal tattoos began to appear all over the Warrior's body.

A black line stretched from his wounded stomach to his chin; Kim Sangyoon's body swelled to the point of bursting. His eyes became completely black; the whites of his sclera were nowhere to be seen. Furthermore, he began to completely overwhelm the Priest's energy.

However, Bae Jaemin laughed at that appearance, "I see now… You were playing around with your skills at the cost of your life, weren't you?"

What did he mean by 'at the cost of his life?'

I looked at Kim Sangyoon, startled by those words. "……!"

Ominously–and just as Bae Jaemin had stated–the Warrior's body was slowly crumbling from the back. It was as if his flesh was turning into dried blood and was flaking away.

However, Kim Sangyoon opened his closed eyes and answered tranquilly, [I'll lose 10 years, and you'll lose 50, you son of a bitch. That's not really a loss, is it?]

He clenched both fists and roared–

[Come at me!]

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: It’s interesting. Kim Sangyoon’s dialogue is now in brackets. I wonder why?

Also T_T I CANT BELIEVE HE’S SACRIFICING HIS LIFE FOR THE HAMSTER!

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Kim Sangyoon jumped to the ceiling before rushing at Bae Jaemin at a tremendous speed. Though the Priest managed to avoid that attack, he left his back open to a follow-up swing.

But…

“[**Change**].”

One of the Priest’s summoned Angels–one of the ones holding a harp–switched positions with Bae Jaemin instantaneously. Kim Sangyoon’s fist stopped just short of smashing the angel’s head.

The angel did not seem to feel any pain–let alone any hindrance–even though its head was half demolished. It acted like a golem rather than a summoned creature.

“[**Hymn**.]” Meanwhile, Bae Jaemin used a new skill. The angel with a broken head, accompanied by the other summoned angels, began to play a solemn melody with their instruments.

I noticed that Bae Jaemin’s feet were slightly floating above the ground; when looking at him, I could see the shadow of flickering, giant wings at his ankles.

After that–as if they were magnets with the same poles–whenever Kim Sangyoon approached, the Priest was pushed gently away, allowing the Priest to avoid all attacks. This was clearly due to the effects of the skill that Bae Jaemin had cast just earlier.

After repeatedly failing to touch the man, Kim Sangyoon growled–

[Are you going to keep running away?!]

Bae Jaemin sneered insidiously, “If I drag time, it’s my victory. Why should I compete with you?”

The Priest was clearly angry but, as he said, Kim Sangyoon was at a disadvantage the longer the fight dragged on. The black debris–the remains of his shattering body–that was fluttering behind Kim Sangyoon was also starting to thicken.

Although the Warrior consumed his life to immediately gain enough power to overwhelm the Priest, it was evident that Kim Sangyoon would bow out of the fight first if Bae Jaemin continued to avoid his attacks.

Kim Sangyoon narrowed his eyes and glared at Bae Jaemin, who kept responding to his attacks with soft jeers.

“[**Berserker Drive, Lunar Eclipse**.]”

However, Kim Sangyoon remained resolutely calm and slowly clenched his fist.

When Kim Sangyoon activated his skill, a circular pattern like a full moon was engraved into the dented ground. As he folded his fingers, one by one, the phases of the moon sequentially blackened until the engraving finally transformed into a thin crescent moon.

That wasn’t all–as the skill activated, the same pattern appeared under Bae Jaemin and the angels’ feet. Bae Jaemin arched his back as if he were trying to escape the influence of the pattern; he floated higher than before.

And then, once more, Kim Sangyoon rushed towards Bae Jaemin at an insane speed.

“It’s…futile!” Bae Jaemin shouted boldly as he fired orbs of light. But, Kim Sangyoon did not avoid the attacks and instead opted to narrow the distance between him and the Priest.

“[**Change**].”

The Warrior almost grabbed Bae Jaemin by the neck, but once again, Bae Jaemin’s skill came out on top.

This time, the Priest had changed positions with an angel carrying a lyre; even as it defended itself, the angel stared blankly at Kim Sangyoon.

However…

Crash–!

“Cough…!”

When Kim Sangyoon punched the angel in the stomach, the other three angels and Bae Jaemin faltered as if they had also been hit in the same area.

Bae Jaemin gritted his teeth and looked at the crescent moon pattern underneath his feet. “This bastard…”

. [Go to the afterlife with your stupid angels.]

Kim Sangyoon raised his fist once more.

Bae Jaemin ground his teeth as he shouted, “[**Perfect Shield**]!”

Cla-Cla-Cla-Clank–!

An opaque shield materialized in front of the Warrior’s fist, and the angel could not be hit. Fist and shield interlocked; it screeched as if a metal pipe was grinding against a window.

However, Kim Sangyoon didn’t give up; as if he had prepared for this situation, he spread his other fist. As his fingers unfurled, one by one, the crescent moon pattern turned back into the full moon once more. At that point, Kim Sangyoon swung his fist.

Clank–!

Immediately, the center of the shield broke as if some heavy weight had slammed against it. The skill the Warrior used just now must have adjusted the distribution of his power according to the number of opponents before him.

Bae Jaemin’s eyes opened wide as he saw the smashed shield–and, consequently, the Warrior’s fist smashed into his face.

I watched Bae Jaemin chew at something in his cheeks before spitting out a white shard of a tooth. When I saw his humiliated expression, I felt as if a bit of my pain had been relieved.

“I’m going to kill you today…” he grumbled.

I couldn’t be too happy though.

His cheeks, swollen from a few good hits, recovered with a flick of the Priest’s finger; the angels who had been smashed and broken here and there had revitalized as if nothing had happened.

Compared to Bae Jaemin's ability to recover as if nothing happened no matter how much he was attacked, it was clear that Kim Sangyoon had reached his limit. Although there was no significant change in Kim Sangyoon's expression, the black dust swirling around him now covered about half of his body.

'No matter how many times he wins skirmishes against Bae Jaemin… What'll happen if Kim Sangyoon dies…?'

Bae Jaemin had now properly prepared himself; this time he raised his staff without taking the time to belittle his opponent.

I didn't know what kind of skill he was about to use, but I felt a shift in the atmosphere…characteristic of a large-scale, wide-area attack. Small clouds gathered around Bae Jaemin's body as if they were mimicking a scene from the holy scriptures; soon, an intense light began to shine over his head, piercing through the ceiling.

Then Kim Sangyoon stepped back for the first time since launching his [**Berserker Drive**] ability. When I saw a hitherto unseen, anxious expression on his face, my body also tensed.

"[**Divine Possession**]." When the words finally tumbled out of Bae Jaemin's mouth, the skill was fully activated.

I didn't know much about a High Priest's skills, but when the Priest's eyes opened, I was immediately overwhelmed–I couldn't dare look at him directly.

[Divine Possession].

An incredible skill that calls upon a god to descend upon the User; Bae Jaemin had succeeded in stuffing something so tremendous into his body. It was almost unbelievable to imagine that something like a god could reside in his small and insignificant mortal flesh.

[Tsk…. What's that?]

Kim Sangyoon had also felt that presence; his expression became momentarily agitated.

I felt the gravity of the situation when that high-dimensional being used Bae Jaemin's eyes to face us… Unfortunately, I immediately sensed what emotions it harbored.

It was not even slightly benevolent towards us. No–it was clearly hostile and exuded killing intent.

[Traitors of order and righteousness…You must be apostles of the Retrograde, violators of the right order.] [1]

However, it did not immediately reach out to us. That being could immediately quash us, but, ironically, the being probably felt no need to rush because it was so overwhelmingly powerful.

Though it spoke using Bae Jaemin's mouth, its voice was completely different from that of the Priest's. Permeating throughout its words was a predominant emotion: contempt.

[The smell of corpses is so disgustingly strong… I see, the Retrograde still thrives in this world through disgusting means.]

With that mysterious statement, it looked at me rather than Kim Sangyoon, the Warrior that stood right in front of me.

'Is it because I'm a Necromancer…?'

While it was well-known and true that Priests were well equipped against evil attributes, the god's proclamation didn't seem to be talking about a mere superficial gap in power.

But that vaulted, distant god seemed unwilling to kindly explain the matter to me. Of course, I didn't expect such consideration, either.

The God soon took its eyes off of me and looked at the Warrior, covered in black smoke.

[Whether in the past or now, you always make stupid choices… Iora.]

[…What are you talking about? Tsk.]

[Doesn't he feel any shame at being reduced to a weapon?]

After muttering this, the god raised both arms; the scattered angels lined up behind it, emitting an incomparably intense aura.

Then, the god gracefully frowned, and with its hands raised and sweeping through the air, it declared–

[While the sun is up, we shall emerge victorious.]

[Aaaah~ aaaah~ aaaah~ aaaah~]

The angels behind the god opened their mouths, singing what seemed to be a wordless hymn. A beautiful melody began to fill the entire house.

Though it was definitely a dark early dawn outside the window just earlier, the whole house surprisingly began to brighten…as if the sun had just risen. I could no longer feel any darkness outside that window.

Become a Patron!

TL: Iora??? What tf is going on? Why is Kim Sangyoon Iora??? Who is this ‘god’?

Footnotes

1. So, is a word that means “going against the flow” or “moving in the opposite direction.” It can be used both literally and metaphorically, for example, to describe someone who is driving the wrong way on a road, or someone who is going against societal norms or conventions. This word was already used before to describe Seo Dawon’s skill path or skill tree.

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Chapter 332

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[The ‘daytime’ status has been applied, reducing the attack power of all your skills by 20%.]

[Your enemy has now declared their territory: All skills with the evil attribute will now be affected by a maximum of 20% reduced effectiveness.]

[Still, you haven’t run away… Your foolishness is now certainly admirable.]

[It’s a shame we can’t see more of Choi Lee-kyung’s interesting (laughter) story… But.]

[If luck befalls on you again, try to distance yourself from Iora, who is out of control… Well, that is, if your corpse remains intact at that point.]

In the brightly lit living room–as if the ceiling had been blown straight off–gray system messages materialized before my eyes and spoke to me in a mocking tone.

When I tried to swipe the last message away with my pained hand to read the next message box, the messages remained as they were, unchanging, as if to say, “I’ve said everything I need to say.” As if the system was washing its hands of me. I screamed inwardly as I read that enraging, irresponsible script, ‘Just what on earth are you talking about?!!’

As I vented my anger, I suddenly looked at Kim Sangyoon standing by himself a little distance away. Now, covered in black smoke, the only things visible were his red pupils.

The burning red eyes were shaped oddly–eerily…as if they were enflaming the man’s soul. However, the presence of the ‘God’ within Bae Jaemin’s body was still overwhelming us.

‘Damn…’

Although I couldn’t clearly grasp the power gap between those two since my level wasn’t high enough, I could guess that the entity in the Priest’s body was stronger–by the distance from heaven to earth–than the Warrior.

If things continued this way, Kim Sangyoon would surely die. However, I couldn’t leave him behind and run away, nor could I die with him. So, I continued to chew on my lips and wrack my brain, over and over again.

‘I think it called Kim Sangyoon, ‘Iora’…. And, what did it say about a ‘weapon’….?’

Then, I suddenly realized that I couldn’t see [Berserker], the weapon Kim Sangyoon had been using.

“Don’t tell me…”

As a groan-like gasp burst out of my mouth, Kim Sangyoon turned his head towards me. Even though his face was covered in ash, his desperate emotions were clearly evident in his red eyes. Kim Sangyoon slowly closed and opened his bloodshot eyes, imploring–

[Please, run away. Honestly, I don’t think I can last long.]

"……"

However, how could I turn my back on that face when his expression detailed so clearly that he was prepared to die?

[Haah…]

Kim Sangyoon sighed when he saw me quietly shaking my head; the area around his eyes reddened when he heard my sobs.

Kim Sangyoon wiped away his tears with his thick fists and cursed under his breath–

[…Damn it, just go already…]

"……"

[You won't be of any help by staying.]

However, even as he said that, Kim Sangyoon drew his fist back as if he were notching and pulling the drawstring of a bow. The 'God' had observed our 'skit' with arms folded across his chest and one eyebrow arched.

At that moment, a fierce, unusual air current began to swirl like a red whirlpool around Kim Sangyoon's fist. The god clicked its tongue, shook its finger gracefully with its arms still crossed, and said–

[Iora, Iora… You're acting like an ignorant agent of destruction.]

[Fucker, the hell are you saying?]

[You're not capable of wielding so much power. You'll crumble before you reach me.]

[Stop making excuses and die!!]

Kim Sangyoon, who was visibly nervous, took the initiative and rushed at his opponent. The god avoided his attack by simply leaning its head to the side.

Crash–!

Where the god had avoided, the red air current shot out from Kim Sangyoon's fist and smashed into the wall, shattering it with a loud crash.

I had thought another User living nearby would notice us from behind the exposed wall, but… I was soon astonished to note that only a white void–a blank space–spread out from behind the confines of my wall.

No other buildings or people could be seen–it was like the white backdrop at a photo studio. This isolation of our space was probably due to a boundary skill.

Come to think of it, even though Bae Jaemin had recklessly smashed the house as he entered, no neighbors noticed the strange noises or made a fuss.

'Bae Jaemin… He prepared in advance.'

I furrowed my brows at his insidiousness.

Meanwhile, the fierce battle between Kim Sangyoon and the 'God' continued. Rather, I should call it a one-sidedly fierce battle. Kim Sangyoon began to breathe heavily, and black powder spewed out of the Warrior's gaping mouth. But, there was no change in Bae Jaemin's expression.

Rather, the 'God' looked a bit bored with Kim Sangyoon's attacks as he avoided them with tremendous speed.

Goosebumps raised on my skin as I followed the movements of Bae Jaemin's eyes, tracing each attack; Kim Sangyoon shook his head with despair as if he could feel the widening gap.

[Well, wild boars would make a better opponent.]

At the same time, the ‘God’ struck Kim Sangyoon’s stomach by suddenly increasing the length of his staff.

Slam–!

[Cough….!]

When Kim Sangyoon couldn’t defend against the undoubtedly faster attack and suffered a hit, the ‘God’ didn’t stop there and continued to plunge the staff through the Warrior’s spine.

I screamed as I saw the end of the staff poking out of Kim Sangyoon’s back like a blade of a knife. “No!!!”

Then, at that moment, I heard a frosty, cold voice.

[Iora, what’s wrong with you?]

Bae Jaemin slowly stirred the staff with a bored expression, and Kim Sangyoon tried to endure the pain with mouth wide open. The Warrior tried to block the Priest’s languid movements by holding onto the end of the staff, trying to break the staff, or using it as a tool to continue their power struggle.

However…

Slice–!

As soon as Kim Sangyoon’s hand reached the staff, it dug deep into the finger with a sharp energy, nearly amputating it. Though blood did not flow from the Warrior’s hand, the dust had suddenly and unusually scattered from the area like an exploding firecracker.

Eventually, Kim Sangyoon stumbled back. Then, like a person whose excitement had drained out of them, Bae Jaemin stopped and quietly

watched the Warrior stagger around. Squinting his eyes, he mumbled–

[You've gotten rusty.]

[That's right… This disgrace suits you.]

With that said, Bae Jaemin raised the staff high above his head. Soon, dozens of concentric magic circles began to overlap and spread out above Bae Jaemin's head.

I felt suffocated and overwhelmed as I watched the golden tidal wave spreading out before my eyes, blinding my vision.

'That's…He'll actually die from that…'

At that moment, I forgot about my own injuries, jumped to my feet, and ran between Kim Sangyoon and Bae Jaemin.

Bae Jaemin merely looked at me as if he saw a moth jumping into the light and didn't try to stop me. As if I were something annoying but didn't require any overt countermeasures. He snorted, content to crush me and Kim Sangyoon both.

But, just then…

Clap–!

I heard a clapping noise from somewhere.

[What…!]

The house, which had been as bright as day, quickly plunged into the darkness of night.

Now, it was so dark that it was hard to see what was right in front of my eyes. However, I continued to run forward–I knew where Kim Sangyoon had been. “Sangyoon-ssi…!”

My fingertips gripped soft cloth and a firm chest.

I tried to step back, startled, but the stranger pulled me into his embrace and hugged me. And when I pressed my nose against his chest, I remembered smelling that distinctive, paralyzing scent somewhere before.

“Don’t make a noise, Choi Lee-kyung-ssi.”

“Moon…Issak?”

“I said, shut up.” Moon Issak gently covered my mouth.

This man’s appearance was truly unexpected, so I was completely unnerved. For some reason, I felt like he wasn’t here to harm me… It was like he had come to rescue me.

But, at that moment, I felt someone’s presence behind Moon Issak. I flinched in surprise, but Moon Issak simply lowered his voice and gave dry instructions to the approaching silver-haired woman. “Please move him.”

Silently listening to the investigator’s instruction, the woman immediately crouched down and easily lifted up a person–that must be Kim Sangyoon. He was easily double her size, but there was no change in her expression.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: There’s so much going on >.<

I can’t believe I’m so sad over Kim Sangyoon. And also, what in the meta is going on? The system is extra sentient today.

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Chapter 333

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[———!!!]

Afterwards, Moon Isaak began to walk confidently towards some unknown location.

What was surprising, though, was that after the room became pitch black, there was no sign of Bae Jaemin anywhere.

Obviously, the Priest must have noticed the change in the environment. But, besides a strange humming vibration in the air, I could see neither hide nor hair of the Priest.

I looked up at Moon Issak–he must have done something. But, I could only vaguely make out the outlines of his face in this dim light, so I couldn't exactly see the man's expressions.

"…Ugh," I groaned.

Meanwhile, perhaps he felt my gaze, Moon Issak looked down and me and squeezed my shoulder.

"…..!"

The problem, though, was that my hand was in tatters. When Moon Issak heard my small groan, he stopped and raised my damaged hand.

"…**[Healing]**."

"…Ngh." At that moment, I recalled the pain that Bae Jaemin had inflicted on me with his healing skills and immediately recoiled, but Moon Issak's skill didn't cause me pain. However, even after the blue light radiating from his hands disappeared, my wound did not heal and remained the same.

I was flustered because this was the first time that had ever happened. Moon Issak simply stared me in the eyes for a moment before raising his free hand. He took a potion out of the inventory and poured it over my wound.

As the cold liquid absorbed into my broken hand, the throbbing pain gradually began to subside.

When I moved my fingers slowly, testing them out, Moon Issak gently gripped my hand to block those movements. "Bones take some time to stick together, so don't move."

"…Thank you… so much."

"……"

I awkwardly lowered my head, but then I felt a stabbing gaze. When I hesitated and raised my head again, Moon Issak had already turned his back and was walking forward.

However…

'…Why isn't he letting go of my hand?'

I was unexpectedly dragged away by his warm hand. Discomfited, I tried a couple of times to wriggle out of his grip, but after the investigator fixed his hold each time, I eventually gave up.

To be frank, Moon Issak probably appeared at this fortuitous timing for his own plans. If he was holding onto me, then I probably had no way of making him release his grip.

When I had resigned myself and released the strength from my hand, Moon Issak also slightly loosened his strong grip. “Is Koo Hui-seo starving you?”

“…What?”

“It’s been less than a few months since we last met–You’ve lost all your cheek fat.”

Something completely absurd tumbled out of his mouth.

I frowned and closed my mouth, but I felt an eerie chill inside when he pressed slowly on my knuckles, as if he were weighing them.

“What are you…” I asked.

“You’re skin and bones. You were at least somewhat decent looking before.”

“……” I closed my mouth because I had no response. Moon Issak laughed unpleasantly.

I decided to ignore him and instead looked at the silver-haired woman who was carrying a drooping Kim Sangyoon on her back while walking next to us.

Her long hair and expressionless face were reminiscent of Kim Olim. However, her physique was significantly smaller; the line of her eyes was higher than the Paladin as well. It was admirable to see her carry Kim Sangyoon–who was at least two meters tall–without breathing heavily despite the disadvantages brought about by her physique.

At that moment, she turned her head unexpectedly and looked at me–perhaps she had sensed my stare.

Embarrassed, I thought to quickly turn away, but, before I did so, she smiled slightly. Despite her ice cold appearance, she had a surprisingly good personality…

“Stop saying such vulgar things and guide us properly.” However, before I could finish my thoughts, she looked at Moon Issak and spoke coldly. The smile disappeared, and I wondered if I had hallucinated.

I was worried that with Moon Issak’s personality this might lead to a fight, but to my surprise, the man shrugged his shoulders and responded quite softly (compared to his usual character). “Your imagination is quite active.”

“It’s just disgusting.”

“Choi Lee-kyung didn’t say anything, though?”

“It seems like he doesn’t even want to engage?”

Of course, that didn’t mean there was no tension between them.

Still, the two seemed quite close even though they quarreled. I kept my mouth closed and didn’t intervene, just watching their war of words.

I was so tired from Bae Jaemin today that I couldn’t be bothered to care about their conversation or what may happen in the future.

However, my body had also reached its limit; while taking a step, my feet became tangled from the strength of Moon Issak’s pull, and I almost fell forward if not for the man’s catch.

As Moon Issak hugged me, he said something completely nonsensical to his silver-haired acquaintance. “Look at that. I’m standing still, and Choi Lee-kyung is seducing me with his body again.”

“When did I…!” However, strangely, as soon as I leaned into the investigator’s arms, my body gradually relaxed.

I tried to right myself, but, somehow, the more strength I placed in my arms the more my knees buckled. Moreover, as I got closer to Moon Issak, his scent, which seemed to penetrate deep into my nostrils, felt nauseatingly strong.

In the end, I vomited iron-tasting blood that surged up while still in Moon Issak's embrace.

"Tsk, oh my…"

Our party paused at that moment. The silver-haired woman's brows furrowed, worry etched all over her face. Moon Issak seemed a bit annoyed, perhaps because I dirtied his jacket and shirt.

However, instead of cleaning his jacket, he scooped up both my legs with his arms and lifted me up. This hold–his gesture–was just too explicit.

"P-Put me down, please!" In my struggles, I grabbed Moon Issak by the collar (?) because I had no other hold. However, the man merely adjusted his neck and stance a few times before he settled into a comfortable position.

Moon Issak looked down at my wide-eyed expression and continued walking, "Choi Lee-kyung-ssi. It seems that your body is no longer responding to the potion."

"W…What?"

"You've vomited it all out."

As I lowered my head following Moon Issak's gaze, I noticed my hand had swelled again, turning dark from the spreading bruises. There was also a pungent, fishy smell in my nose followed by a trickle of blood.

Moon Issak looked at my mouth, wide open from shock, and clicked his tongue, "Did Seo Dawon not tell you about this?"

"…What?"

"Don't mess with a High Priest."

Although it sounded like a joke, his words didn't seem like mere jest. After all, a name that Moon Issak shouldn't have mentioned had tumbled out of his lips.

Moon Issak looked at me; I turned pale instantly. Despite my consternation, he offered a faint smile.

“H-How…”

“However, the consequences were surprisingly light compared to your actions.”

“……”

“Wasn’t Ryu Hyerin’s disappearance also your doing?”

Moon Issak’s confident tone, which seemed to suggest he had evidence, wiped my mind blank.

I tried to say something, but I was starting to get out of breath and nothing would come out of my mouth. Moon Issak did not care about my reaction and continued to walk.

But, that silence suffocated me. I wondered what exactly the investigator knew and what his inner thoughts were.

To be frank, I was so anxious that I couldn’t even express an ounce of my curiosity. Though he was pretending to be friendly, once we arrived at our destination–a place hidden from the public eye–perhaps at that point, I’d… I’d be dragged into his infamous underground cellar.

Before I knew it, I had gathered my trembling hands to my chest. I could feel Moon Issak’s stare, but it was still hard to hide my body’s tremors. The bones on the back of my re-shattered hand caused acute pain, but I couldn’t calm myself. Panic overwhelmed me.

His eyes like snakes, Moon Issak glanced at me before placing a finger on my swollen hand. He then drew a simple figure–a star? The back of my hand sparkled blue, and the pain began to subside.

After blocking my pain, the investigator walked to the end of the illuminated path. The silver-haired woman quietly followed.

Then, as he embraced me, Moon Issak softly whispered, “Don’t rack your brains and stay still, because it’ll be beyond more than whatever you’re imagining.”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Get Moon Issak away from me D:

I don’t want anything from his cellar.

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Chapter 334

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After hearing those words–were they part of an intimidation tactic or was he trying to reassure me?–I could barely move. Subsequently, we hastened our steps in silence and successfully arrived at a seemingly barely visible exit.

When I passed through and looked around, we were located within a dense forest that made it difficult to accurately pinpoint our location. The black hole we escaped through disappeared.

I turned around and looked at our group; now that his body was revealed under the light, I was shocked to see Kim Sangyoon's condition. "Sangyoon-ssi…!"

The Warrior was critically injured; I couldn't even tell if he was breathing.

Alongside the large wound, his appearance had changed quite gruesomely. His skin had shriveled, as if it had lost moisture rapidly, making Kim Sangyoon look 20 years older. Furthermore, his complexion was quite pale.

Though no blood dripped from the large hole in Kim Sangyoon's abdomen, it seemed as if even the blood that should have been gushing out from the wound had already drained out of his body.

"He… he's not dead, right?" I struggled to reach out to the body, but the silver-haired woman looked at me before shaking her head.

“Please don’t worry too much. Since he escaped from the holy field before he died…If all goes well, he’ll regain consciousness,” she explained in a kind tone before gently placing Kim Sangyoon down on the flat ground. Afterwards, she placed her hand into a gap–some interdimensional pocket.

She then took a huge sewing needle–the size of my hand–out of the inventory along with a small pair of scissors. With one in each hand, she looked calmly down at the fallen Warrior.

“[**Repair, begin**].” After shouting the skill’s name in a loud voice, she approached Kim Sangyoon’s lower abdomen and neatly cut off his battle suit. Then, she thrust the huge needle, without threading it, into the edge of the open wound.

As I watched the scene, I winced for a moment and didn’t turn away. Fortunately, there seemed to be no pain, and Kim Sangyoon showed no significant reaction.

“[**Suturing**].” She began to sew at an incredible speed.

Despite the absence of thread, Kim Sangyoon’s wound surprisingly began to close neatly. It was an impossible feat with modern surgical techniques, and there was no trace left behind after the wound was sewn.

“Excuse me, are you by any chance a Healer?” I asked, recalling a class I had only heard about through rumors. But, as soon as I asked, I felt embarrassed because Moon Issak suddenly smugly grinned as if he were about to laugh.

I thought I had made a mistake, but fortunately, the silver-haired woman responded casually, “No. I’m a Puppeteer.”

“Puppeteer…?”

“It’s a rare class… People don’t really know about it.” With that said, she stood up and clapped her hands lightly.

Clap–!

As soon as he heard the applause, Kim Sangyoon opened his eyes.

“S-Sangyoon-ssi!”

“……”

However, Kim Sangyoon only had his eyes wide open and remained motionless. Worried about his condition, I looked at the silver-haired woman again.

She answered my questioning gaze patiently, “Most of his muscles had been ruptured, so I’m trying not to overdo it.”

“Then…”

“He’s past the critical stage, but his condition isn’t looking too good… Probably…Healing won’t be much help at this point.”

I opened my eyes wide at the despairing diagnosis. Then… What’ll happen to Kim Sangyoon in the future? “T-Then, Sangyoon-ssi will…”

“It’ll be difficult for him to continue as a User… First, though, I contacted some medical staff outside of the Hub…”

“What?!”

“..It’s a pity, but even if he’s transferred to a hospital, I doubt he’ll be able to walk again.” After laying down that harsh judgment, she gazed at me.

“……” I looked instead at Kim Sangyoon’s face–eyes open and unable to blink.

What do you mean it’d be hard as a User? Then, does she mean that Kim Sangyoon will have to lie down like that for the rest of his life? Moreover, everything that had happened to the Warrior was my fault. I… I was caught by Bae Jaemin…

“W-What should…” I was so guilty that I couldn’t even speak properly.

But then Moon Issak spoke to me as if he were trying to tempt me, “You’re not left with no recourse...”

“What do you mean?”

“You can use your class.”

I raised my head at that unexpected remark. “What are you talking about?”

“Kim Sangyoon is… half-dead anyway, right?”

“……”

“If you actually kill him and sign a ‘Necromancer’ contract with him… He’d be able to move, hm?”

“Are you insane?” I knew Moon Issak was a psycho, but at that moment, I felt really disgusted with him.

However, Moon Issak didn’t consider my position or my feelings and continued to speak freely. “I’m being serious, though? Kim Sangyoon’s class relies on his body to make a living. Unlike Bae Jaemin, he cannot maintain peak performance missing an arm or an eye.”

“What… What nonsense…!”

“Even if he regains consciousness in the hospital, do you think he’d be grateful to you?”

“…What?”

“Won’t he resent you? He was trying to save you when he became crippled. I bet he didn’t expect to lose his promising future.”

“……” I felt like I was running out of oxygen; I ignored the pain as I held onto my chest.

However, Moon Issak’s awful words didn’t stop there. “Black magic–it’s always like that. Well… You gain one thing and you lose another.”

“……”

“Whether or not he’s transferred to a surgical ward, his chances of survival are 50/50.”

“……”

“Of course, even if he lives, it’s 100% certain that he’ll become disabled. Look at his thigh–all the muscles there have torn and burst.”

I listened to Moon Issak and, as if I were possessed, looked towards the Warrior’s leg.

I saw a noticeably deformed swelling above his knee. Moreover, when my eyes caught the dark, bruised skin through the gap in his torn combat uniform… tears involuntarily streamed down my face.

Despite knowing that it wasn’t the time to cry, my heart was pained. And Moon Isaac, watching me cry, smiled and cruelly whispered, “You may feel proud that you saved him for a few years… but, won’t he just end up committing suicide within ten years? Could you just let that happen?”

I wanted to tell him to shut up, but no words came out.

In addition, the Puppeteer, who had been kind to me during this entire time, didn’t stop Moon Issak and just watched our conversation. She probably also judged that Kim Sangyoon couldn’t live as a User in the future.

“…A different…A different Priest…” I could barely refute those words– my sanity had been overcome by desperation.

However, Moon Issak replied with a vicious sneer, “In Korea, the only Priests who are strong enough to cast [Divine Possession] are Ryu Hyerin and Bae Jaemin.”

“……”

“You killed one; the other wouldn’t ever cure Kim Sangyoon even if he were about to die.”

“……”

“You can’t stomach killing him and resurrecting him as a zombie?”

I couldn’t endure anymore and punched Moon Issak in the cheek. Of course, my punch didn’t hurt him at all; he merely looked at me with an expression that said, ‘I let you hit me.’

Moon Issak seized my wrist, and I felt an insurmountable power gap between us. He spoke quite underhandedly, “Of course, there is another option, Choi Lee-kyung.”

“……”

“Oh my… Are you sulking now?” Moon Issak gripped my chin so that I couldn’t escape and locked our gazes. I wanted to spit into those madness-filled eyes.

However, Moon Issak was faster. “You can make me the [Pope].”

“What…?” I couldn’t understand his words and frowned.

However, Moon Isaac continued speaking without any hesitation. It seemed that he had expected my reaction. “If you collect all of the Goddess’s relics, even the dead can be brought back to life.”

That reminded me of a previous conversation my Servants and I had had about Moon Isaac's obsession with the Goddess. That was the reason why Jung Garam had been able to entice him with the black market ticket.

Barely suppressing my anger, I tried to respond calmly. "You're saying I'm needed to gather those artifacts?"

"That's right. The scenario I'm searching for is within your reach."

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Scenarios? I'm reminded of the time Kim Olim talked to Seo Dawon about chasing his "scenario."

Also, Holy…I know it's a manipulation tactic…but I can't believe Moon Issak just so casually talked about Lee-kyung killing Kim Sangyoon.

Also Also… I'll probably be taking a break around the 1st week of July and the days leading up to it. I have a mini-tumor on my pituitary gland and I"ll be going to Korea to do various tests and hopefully get rid of it. I'll be quite busy for the entire month of July, but especially so for the first two weeks.

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Chapter 335

Chapter 335

Then, as soon as Moon Issak finished speaking, the alarm indicating new incoming System messages rang.

[You have received a scenario-sharing request from User, ‘Moon Issak.’]

[If you share a scenario with Moon Issak, you can use him as a powerful Ally. You can look forward to a large increase in power.]

[However, the scenario’s reward may be reduced or changed, and you will be bound to actively cooperate with and fulfill Moon Isaac’s desired reward of obtaining the [Pope] position.]

[At this point, you are unaware of the progress of the scenario you’re currently working on.]

[Sadly, the User, ‘Moon Issak,’ seems like the kind of human being who would be willing to resort to violent means if you reject his offer.]

[User, ‘Moon Issak,’ is deeply interested in you, but… it wouldn’t be wise to provoke him.]

The system was still handing me new information in that half-mocking tone.

I couldn’t fathom the criteria for when a system message would be sent or what information was contained inside, but the bastard only summarized the situation after I’d almost figured out the whole process or situation already. It never gave a heads-up, and it even looked as if it tried to gloss over or hide important information in order to influence my choices.

Even now, the system was pretending to be objective, but the messages were essentially thinly-veiled threats pushing me to cooperate with Moon Issak.

I had no idea what scenario I was currently undertaking, and the only thing I’ve noticed is that Moon Issak would be greatly bolstered if I were to join his scenario.

So, even though I theoretically had the upper hand…

‘He’s trying to persuade me by holding Kim Sangyoon hostage?’

Furthermore, I was particularly bothered by one of the system’s sentences: [The Scenario’s reward may be reduced or changed].

I had no idea what scenario I was currently undertaking, but… my goal was clear when I signed a Contract with the Servants: the resurrection of the [Red Lotus] guild.

However, when one considers this goal as a reward…and if the reward was reduced or changed… In the worst-case scenario, I may not be able to fully revive the Servants or only a portion of them. What a terrible thought.

I glanced at the system message again. My heart tightened when I saw ‘violent means’ written at the bottom, but even if I were to be tortured by Moon Issak, I couldn’t accept his proposal as it was.

However, it was also unwise for me to give a direct refusal in my current situation. After all, Kim Sangyoon's life was currently entrusted to a woman who appeared to be Moon Issak's colleague.

So I tried to leave myself some room for other options, "…I can't make that decision by myself."

"Are you worried about Seo Dawon's share of the scenario rewards?" Moon Issak grinned as if he had already guessed my thoughts. "Between Seo Dawon and Kim Sangyoon, of course Seo Dawon would be more valuable."

"…It's not that."

"My current power is stronger than Seo Dawon. Seo Dawon has been stagnant for several years since his death, but I have continued to collect the Goddess's relics, unseal them, and receive high rewards."

"……"

"And, perhaps your insidious Contractor didn't mention it, but… In all Contracts, living Users are given priority. Are you aware of that?"

"What are you saying…"

"No matter what you promised Seo Dawon, if the Contract has already been signed, you can decide how to compensate him." With that said, Moon Issak raised my chin. He was preventing me from bowing my head; with a devilish smile, he whispered, "Whatever you promised Seo Dawon… you can decide on the 'when' whenever you please."

"……"

"You can accomplish his goals just right before you die after 80 years of fooling around… Furthermore, the more you level, the more control you'll have over the Contract and your Contracted party. If you hold out until your level is in the late 6,000s, Seo Dawon wouldn't be able to speak in your presence without your permission."

"……"

"This bond seeps into one's consciousness. No matter how arrogant a summoned being is, their loyalty towards their master increases with time."

"……"

"Of course, our Red Lotus Guildmaster-nim would have tried to hide it, but all intelligent summoned creatures belonging to the Hub System, (excluding imprisoned Users, of course,) follow this rule. This wouldn't be any different for a Necromancer." Moon Issak stared at me quietly, as if he were trying to gauge my reaction.

I made a great effort to not make a contemptuous expression, but it wasn't easy. If he knew that Seo Dawon and I were bound by a Contract, then he could guess how Seo Dawon died. It was almost startling how he could say something so disgusting.

However, considering the relationship Moon Issak had with Seo Dawon while the Mage was still alive, I thought the source of Moon Issak's cruelty may be due to lingering hatred. In the [Vengeful Ghost Memories], Moon Issak seemed to have quite a poor relationship with Seo Dawon.

That's why I didn't even bother to refute those words. I couldn't get involved in their messy relationship.

However, Moon Issak was more perceptive than I had thought. "Oh my…"

He scanned my face with icy eyes. Then, he murmured something incomprehensible, "Have you become intimate with Seo Dawon? How did he seduce you?"

"……"

"Hmm… So you sympathize with Seo Dawon, thinking of him as a 'dead person' rather than a summon."

"……"

“Choi Lee-kyung, Choi Lee-kyung… How foolish. That’s just a programmed, monster-like being, not a human.” Moon Issak attempted to persuade me, but it was hard for me to listen to him anymore. I turned my head away, but was soon stopped by his hand on my chin.

He fixed his gaze on mine. He seemed to hesitate, as if he were contemplating something. At that moment, the Puppeteer standing next to him stopped the inquisitor. She frowned as if she had read something in his furrowed brows. “Don’t tell me… let’s stop this. Do you intend on abandoning the scenario?”

“Wh…at…” I looked at Moon Issak, a rush of anxiety coursing through me. However, he seemed to have made up his mind, influenced by the doll master’s objection.

Moon Issak moved his lips, “[—-].”

He said something, but my ears couldn’t pick it up. However, after Moon Issak opened his mouth, my headache worsened and my heart began to beat violently. Anxiety and tension mixed together; I felt like vomiting.

However, at the same time, I became unable to blink; my gaze was attracted to Moon Issak’s eyes as if they were magnets. When he saw my fixated gaze, he smiled slightly. Only then did the throbbing pain that had been buzzing in my ears gradually subside.

I couldn’t resist, and my body lost strength. The inquisitor looked at me and asked, “Hmm, what would be good? First… What kind of relationship did you have with Seo Dawon?”

“…Ah.” I slowly parted my lips while looking at Moon Isaak’s smile. And, without resisting, I answered something, but my voice didn’t reach my own ears. On the other hand, Moon Isaak seemed to hear me without any problem.

As I finished speaking, Moon Isaak’s expression changed oddly, “Well, this is an unexpected surprise.”

"……"

He lowered his head and whispered something into my ear once more.

I wanted to resist those words, but in the end, I found myself nodding without knowing what Moon Isaak was saying. I felt that it was right to simply accept his words without further judgment. Moreover, the pain that had been ringing in my head gradually subsided the more I stopped resisting.

Upon seeing my softened expression, Moon Issak smiled satisfactorily. The Puppeteer, who was watching us, reprimanded Moon Issak. "…He can't decide to participate in the scenario under hypnosis."

"Do you think I don't know that? However, Choi Lee-kyung will only be able to understand my words after experiencing this."

"…When he wakes up, I bet you'll be faced with a lot of resistance."

"I'll just erase his memory."

"You…"

"Just get rid of your false sympathy. Do we have the leisure to argue about this?"

After the conversation I couldn't understand finished, the Puppeteer eventually closed her mouth. She looked at me with a slightly guilty expression and then carried Kim Sangyoon on her back.

I stared vacantly at both of them before looking at Moon Issak again because he had started to fiddle with my cheek using his cold fingers.

When Moon Issak and I made eye contact, he smiled softly and ordered, "From now on, I'm the person Choi Lee-kyung likes."

"…Yes…"

"As much as you do for —-. Committed. Wholeheartedly."

“…Yes…” My headache flared momentarily, but in the end, I concluded that Moon Issak was right. After nodding vigorously, my heart suddenly started pounding heavily when I looked at him.

Strangely, the echoes of my heart felt sharp and painful. It felt stifling and frustrating… At times, it felt like something was blocked; Moon Issak’s expression made regret and melancholy well up within me.

Such complicated emotions flooded me; tears flowed automatically. Wiping the corners of my eyes where the tears flowed with a handkerchief, he whispered, “When you’re done crying, forget about —- completely.”

“…Ah…”

“Don’t resist. Take a deep sleep, and when you wake up, everything will be alright.”

Just like that, darkness descended.

—-

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Yeah… Fuck Moon Issak. With a cactus.

At least the Puppeteer seems kind-ish. I wonder if she'll help Hamster somehow. Also, Lee-kyung is realizing something is up with the system~

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Chapter 336

Chapter 336

t.w. : The next few chapters will deal heavily with some gaslighting, toxic relationships etc

“I don’t know how to… tie a necktie…”

“Didn’t I teach you how to do it last time?” As he responded, the man leaned over my desk. I felt my heart pounding; it felt like my heart was being squeezed, and I was on the verge of nausea.

However, the man spoke naturally, even though he must have noticed my distorted expression, “Hurry up.”

“……” I wrapped the soft necktie that Moon Issak handed me around his neck. Of course, I couldn’t tie it properly. I followed his instructions from before, but the result ended up looking more like a scarf.

Moon Issak touched the loosely tied knot of the necktie and let out a hollow laugh. “You’re not good at a single thing, hm?”

“…….”

“I feed you and give you a place to stay for free, and yet you’re so useless…” He murmured to himself, but his volume was still loud enough– clearly he meant for me to listen.

I teared up, but I repeated what I had said many times before, “That’s why…! If you’re tired of me, just send me home…”

“I believe I’ve explained many times before. Bae Jaemin is waiting for you.”

“……”

“You can leave if you want to die. I’ve told you this over and over again, but I haven’t locked you up against your will.”

I chewed on my lips as I looked at Moon Issak’s smooth expression. Once again, I couldn’t escape today. I could sense him mocking me for my helplessness, but there was nothing I could do.

The reason why I came to Moon Issak’s house… at least, according to him… was because he saved me. Not long ago, Bae Jaemin had attacked me; Moon Issak found out, and rescued Kim Sangyoon and me from that situation.

Of course, at first I didn’t believe Moon Issak’s one-sided claim; I couldn’t remember anything he mentioned. However, when I saw Kim Sangyoon hooked up to various medical devices, fighting for his life, at Moon Isak’s house, I couldn’t deny it anymore.

According to the investigator, I was also in shock from Bae Jaemin’s attack–my memory lapses were from a mild concussion. That’s why he said he would protect me until Kim Sangyoon woke up.

Of course, I didn’t feel all that grateful inside, but I agreed. My situation was dire enough that I couldn’t reject his rare goodwill.

However, even though the incident was resolved, there were still lingering questions. Why did Moon Issak go through the trouble of rescuing me? As far as I could remember, Moon Issak and I were not particularly close.

That was, perhaps, merely my own perception, though. Moon Issak acted freely, without any restraint, while he housed me.

At first, he let me be alone for a few days, but now a month had passed since I started staying at his house. Moon Issak has become accustomed to bossing me around, whether it was making me tie his necktie–just as he did now–or asking me to cook for him.

Even though I was upset, I did as I was told since he was the landlord. However, every time, Moon Issak was unsatisfied with the results. He would criticize the omelet that I made diligently by searching online for a recipe, saying it was too sweet or too salty. And, after complaining that I didn't know how to tie a necktie in the beginning, he was now constantly nagging me about tying it improperly.

'…Though, it doesn't seem like he dislikes it all that much,' I grumbled inwardly. Though Moon Issak complained, he had yet to undo my messy work around his neck.

Even though he criticized me for the omelet I made yesterday, he cleaned the plate in spite of the complaints. It wasn't just omelets; he said the same about every dish I cooked.

He would say things like, 'Even though I'm not picky, it tastes awfully bad' or 'Don't cook so half-heartedly.' Still, he would finish the plate. But, then he would tell me to make better food next time. In my mind, I would grumble, 'There won't be a next time.'

"I'll stop by at 11:30 today, so prepare lunch," Moon Issak said.

"What…?"

"Let's eat together."

"…Yes…"

But, strangely enough… At some point, whenever I met locked gazes with Moon Isaac, my actions would contradict my true feelings. I pressed

down on my suddenly racing heart. Moon Isaac saw that and gave me an inexplicable smile.

Moon Isaac soon separated from me and entered the dressing room connected to the bedroom; he then emerged holding a well-pressed suit jacket. He calmly donned the clothes in front of the tall mirror.

I awkwardly wobbled down from the desk he had sat me down on and stared at his back. When the man's face disappeared from view, a strange sense of unease began to fill my heart.

'Compared to before… I think something changed. Did he change his hairstyle?'

The lines of his shoulders and his height were similar to before, but the investigator felt unfamiliar as a whole, perhaps due to his lighter hair color.

'I like black hair better…why did he dye his hair?'

With such thoughts in mind, I absentmindedly stared at his hands buttoning up his shirt from behind through the mirror. Then, unexpectedly, a question that had been circling in my mind slipped out of my mouth. "In the past…"

"What?"

"Rings… Did you use to wear rings a lot?"

"……"

"Or am I wrong…?" I stared at Moon Issak.

Strangely enough, he was crumpling his brows as if he had heard some vulgar insult. I flinched at the fierce look and retreated half a step.

However, he soon erased that expression and answered me with a cold smile, "Choi Lee-kyung."

"…Yes?"

“Come closer.”

I had an ominous feeling, but I didn’t dare refuse his order.

I stood in front of him, feeling like I had almost been dragged to this spot; Moon Issak reached out a clean hand–devoid of any accessories–to my face. And, as his large hand simultaneously wrapped around the back of my head, our faces came dangerously close together.

Knowing what would follow, I felt intense resistance, and my whole body trembled. However, I couldn’t push his chest away. Even when his tongue–moving with a hint of malice–invaded my mouth, I couldn’t move a single inch.

Moon Issak infringed upon my mouth, then returned with a pristine expression. I was gripped by an indescribable mixture of repulsion that seemed to engulf me and an intense pounding of my heart that contradicted that repulsion.

Moon Issak warned, “Don’t think too deeply.”

“……”

“What you need to focus on is here: me.”

“…Ah.”

“Don’t disobey me.”

I didn’t feel like answering, so I simply nodded my head. If I opened my mouth, I was worried I might vomit.

However, despite the discomfort, when our eyes met, this time I had to be the one to move first. Moon Issak didn’t push me away even as I placed my arms around his neck.

* * *

“When will you wake up, Sangyoon-ssi?”

“……”

After Moon Issak left for work, I was finally able to escape the torment of being confined within my own body.

As soon as I heard his car pull out of the mansion, I squeezed a generous amount of toothpaste onto my toothbrush and brushed my gums until they bled. Then, concerned about the strands of hair Moon Issak had touched, I washed my hair. In the process, I took a whole-body shower until my body was bloated from the water and my fingertips were puffy.

Exhausted from the cleaning process, I went to the room where Kim Sangyoon was laid to rest and stared at his now unrecognizable face.

Though I complained to the Warrior, in truth, I was more frustrated with myself.

I definitely didn’t like Moon Issak, but I didn’t know why I couldn’t refuse his wants or desires. I didn’t even refute his one-sided claims and, earlier, I had even clung to him first…

“Haa… I’m really fucked up.” Even though I cursed out of frustration, if I meet Moon Issak for lunch later and he demands something similar, I’ll obediently comply again.

Moon Issak said I ‘loved’ him, but how could a heart in love feel so miserable? If he did something worse than a kiss, I might want to hang myself…

“If I had Lackey, I would ask it to stop me, but…”

“……”

“I must really be crazy. I really… I don’t understand why I’m acting this way either.”

"……"

I thought Kim Sangyoon's fingers may have trembled, but there were no significant changes in his vital signs.

I found myself wiping away the tears that had welled up on my face and tightly gripping his stiff hand. Even in this state, I was reassured by Kim Sangyoon's presence. After all, right now I couldn't summon any other servants, let alone Lackey.

'Other servants…?'

My only servant was Lackey, though…

I pressed at my throbbing heart again and straightened my torso with some difficulty. Then, at that moment, I heard the door to the room open quietly.

Click–

"Ah, Da-hee-ssi…."

"Hello."

It was the puppeteer Da-hee. She was an acquaintance of Moon Issak and stopped by the mansion once a day to treat Kim Sangyoon.

She was always polite and kind, but whenever she glanced at me, her expression would grow dark and she would avert her gaze. Perhaps she was overburdened by how much I would ask her about Kim Sangyoon's condition.

I slipped out of the hospital room–with a regretful heart–so she could concentrate on her healing comfortably. Da-hee mouthed something when I passed by; I turned back to look at her, but she avoided my gaze again.

'Did I see wrong…?'

I was leery, but I didn't have the courage to ask her outright. Therefore, I bowed my head slightly as usual and exited the room.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I hope you guys are ready for the trauma train. Also, I'd say I'm first in line to mess up Moon Issak…but I have a feeling that Kim Olim and Seo Dawon are duking it out rn for that right.

Also! I'm taking a break next week for the aforementioned medical stuff! I think updates during July may be sparse.

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Chapter 337

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Moon Issak lived in a huge mansion that was large enough to make me wonder how much a civil servant’s salary could be.

Therefore, the silver lining to this situation was that whenever I felt stifled, I could take a walk in the front yard and admire the well-decorated landscape. As long as I didn’t leave the mansion, Moon Issak let me be.

I sat on the front bench in front of a small, manmade lake and stared blankly at the ripples caused by the wind. As I watched the surface of the lake, the turbulence and nausea in my stomach gradually calmed down.

“Ah… I don’t know. Seriously.” However, the calmness I was so desperately trying to attain quickly dissipated when Moon Issak came to mind.

Objectively, when asked if Moon Issak was handsome or not, he definitely was. However, he wasn’t my taste. That is to say, I prefer those with darker hair and eyes that smile. I also liked a rougher voice than Moon Issak, whose voice was sickly sweet when whispering sweet nothings. However, Dawon was…

“…Huh?” I opened my eyes wide with surprise at the name and face that flashed through my mind.

However, no matter how much I tried to recall, I couldn’t remember who that person was besides a dim impression and scattered syllables. My headache only became worse as well. But as if I had lost something precious, that fleeting memory captivated my attention throughout the day.

And that continued until 11:30AM when Moon Issak returned to the house and I had to face the man.

“It seems you like your food salty?” After finishing off all the brown eggs, Moon Issak complained, openly showing his annoyance.

Because I was lost in my own thoughts while diluting the egg mixture, I had realized too late that I had added an excessive amount of salt. But since I wasn’t the one eating the dish, I just went ahead and cooked it.

Moon Issak grimaced in disdain the moment he took a bite of the salty rolled omelets–rather, rolled salt–but he eventually ate everything. [1] I stared at him, wondering if he was very hungry. As expected, he didn’t let this mistake pass.

I timidly retorted to the picky man, “You don’t have to eat if it doesn’t taste any good.”

“I thought it would be better than yesterday.”

“Then… Let go of your expectations…”

“……” Moon Issak shot me a heated glare as he wiped his mouth with a napkin. I quickly averted my gaze and pretended to be absorbed in the scenery. He continued to stare at me for a while before picking up his plate and standing up.

Thud–

Afterwards, as he stood up, he placed a small box roughly on the table. I didn't think the packaged box was meant for me, so I didn't touch it…

When Moon Issak returned after doing the dishes, he sighed and treated me like a fool, "Do I have to ask you to unwrap packages now?"

"What? No, this… Was it for me?"

"You've been pestering me for a ring since this morning."

"I did? When?"

"I thought that's what you meant?"

I stared at him dumbfoundedly, but Moon Issak merely shrugged arrogantly.

I glanced at the black box reluctantly and with a heavy heart. I didn't want to open the box, but I couldn't refuse. Therefore, I reached out and slowly opened the lid of the box.

The design of the ring was overtly symbolically suggestive, nearly demolishing my resolve. "…It's not an engagement ring, right?"

"It's around that price."

"No, I… I'm fine."

"In the future, when you think of rings, try to be satisfied with that one." Afterwards, Moon Issak didn't listen to me and lifted my hand freely. Then, he placed the ring on the ring finger of my scarred left hand where no traces of normal skin remained, as if the ring were an iron shackle.

When Moon Issak touched my left ring finger, I felt a strong sense of discomfort, but I stayed still out of a greater fear of what he may do if I refused him once again.

I stared at the gem–presumably a diamond–embedded in the ring and chewed on my lips.

When Moon Issak saw that, he ‘ordered’ me in a cold tone, “Don’t take it off. Cherish it.”

“…Yes.”

“You don’t want your finger bones to be crushed again.”

“……”

“I don’t want to hurt you either.”

“Haah…” When I heard those hateful words, I released a deep sigh.

However, I could not express my frustrations to Moon Issak; I was incapable of thinking deeply about or expressing accurately the pain he caused me. That was one of his irrefutable rules.

“By the way, about Sangyoon-ssi… When do you think he’ll regain consciousness?” I changed the subject to avoid the memories I’d rather not recall.

After a moment’s silence, Moon Issak answered patiently, “They said he’ll be up in a month or two.”

“I see…”

“When Kim Sangyoon wakes up, you…”

“Yes?”

“No–it’s nothing.” After his rare moment of hesitation, he switched back to his usual tone, “It’s become a little late today, so you should sleep first.”

“Alright.” As I nodded slowly, his expression eased a little. He gently stroked my face as if petting a well-behaved dog, then stood up from his seat.

I followed him to the front door, saw him off, and stared at the taillights of the exiting car. As soon as the door closed, I glared at the ring on my left

hand, “…Seriously frustrating.”

I tried forcefully to remove the ring, but, despite the ring being slightly loose, it still wasn’t easy to take off. My hand kept losing strength, making the process difficult. I was robbed of my strength as my body recalled the punishment I had incurred for defying Moon Issak’s words earlier. My body’s memories and the determination in my mind collided, making my hand tremble uncontrollably.

But, after a long struggle, I was able to get the ring off my finger. My whole body was soaked with cold sweat, but my heart felt both refreshed and proud. Because, even though this spot–my finger–was in tatters, what was engraved here was my only…

“……”

I rose from my seat, wiping away at my sudden outpour of tears. Something came to mind a moment ago, but it only made me uneasy without providing any clear answers.

I glared at the ring on my palm; struck by a sudden impulse to wear it once more, I threw it out of the window. I felt like I would give in to my body’s fear if I continued to hold onto it.

However, I didn’t think that anyone would be watching my foolish behavior.

“Choi Lee-kyung-ssi.”

“Ah…”

Startled, I looked back; Da-hee-ssi stared back, her skin pale like a ghost.

I became anxious, as if I had been caught doing something bad. Just how long had she been watching? What if she were to tell Moon Issak…

“…I’m going to get going,” she said.

“Ah, yes… T-t-take care.”

“……”

Fortunately, Da-hee-ssi must not have seen very well–or she may be feigning ignorance.

I nodded politely and bid her farewell. As I turned around, I noticed my reddened eyes in the mirror hanging by the entrance. Without giving it much thought, I immediately headed upstairs to Kim Sangyoon’s room, where he lay just as he had been this morning. However, he was the only person I could rely on in this house, so I sat by his side and engaged in a futile conversation.

“Sangyoon-ssi. Moon Issak says you’ll be able to wake up in a month or two.”

“…….”

“Mm, I wonder if I’ll be able to summon Lackey at that point…”

“……”

“But you know, my memories have gotten fuzzy these days… And my system messages are blocked, too. It just says that those aren’t available in areas where [Sacred Grounds] have been declared.”

“……”

“I think Moon Issak declared the [Sacred Ground]… That’s a Priest skill, right? Right? I’m going crazy because they’re not letting me go. He won’t do what I ask of him and instead buys a weird ring… He must be insane.”

“……”

However, as always, Kim Sangyoon didn’t answer. I could only hear the faint hissing noise of the humidifier spraying mist.

I stared at his face for a few minutes, but Kim Sangyoon remained as silent as ever. Exhausted, I lowered my head and continued with my resentful words. “According to Moon Issak, if I give up, he’ll release the sacred grounds… What on earth am I supposed to give up on…?”

“……”

“Sangyoon-ssi, you find this weird too, right? What’s so important about doing things ‘voluntarily?'”

“……”

“He’s already doing whatever he wants anyway.” As I spoke my emotions intensified and a sense of hatred seeped through. I couldn’t stop myself from cursing Moon Issak. I hated him so much. Sometimes, I thought I hated him more than Bae Jaemin.

However, the thought that I “hated him” also seemed to be a mistake. My lips trembled with anxiety; I fixed my words, “I’m wrong, aren’t I?”

“……”

“I’m the one who’s being stubborn… If I relented, everyone would be more comfortable…”

“……”

“Sometimes, I think it’s my fault that Sangyoon-ssi isn’t waking up…”

“……”

“Haah… What do you think, Sangyoon-ssi?”

Again there was no answer.

I believed, though, that if he were conscious, he’d say ‘What nonsense! Let’s quickly get out of here!’ However, when I looked at him–quiet, eyes closed–my guilt intensified, and I could only hold onto those thoughts for so long.

I gently adjusted the slightly crumpled blanket under Kim Sangyoon's raised arm, then opened the door and left the room. I returned to the garden and circled around it again and again. I couldn't bear this stifling feeling.

The sun began to set; the streetlights in the garden turned on, one by one. After wandering around the garden for hours, I could no longer ignore the incoming chill.

'I have to go inside…'

However, when I looked at the entrance to Moon Issak's house, I couldn't bear to take another step. I felt a sense of impending anxiety; somehow, if I continued to live there, I believed everything–my ego–would be sucked in and shredded in a blender.

However, at that moment.

"Hello."

I suddenly heard a friendly voice from behind the bench I was sitting on.

"…..!" I looked back, trembling as if I had been struck by lightning.

There stood a remarkably beautiful man–someone I had never seen in my life. I stood there dumbly, mouth open, obsessing over his red eyes and black hair. The strands stood still, undisturbed by the cold wind.

The man said, "May I sit by your side?"

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Lee-kyung noooo. My heart hurts so much for him–especially during that conversation with Kim Sangyoon. Also, if I'm reading this correctly… Moon Issak ruined Lee-kyung's arm to keep him obedient?

Also, I'm still technically on hiatus guys. I just didn't want to leave you all hanging.

Footnotes

1.

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“Um, yeah…” I nodded and gave the adjacent seat to the man.

This was the first time I wasn’t bothered by a stranger using informal speech with me. My heart beat so loudly I pressed at my chest, worried the man would hear. I couldn’t even talk to him properly.

However, the man, now sitting down, followed up with a gentle question, “What were you doing?”

“I-I’m just… I felt frustrated, so I was…walking.” I tried my best to respond to the man’s interest. As I spoke, I found myself rambling and losing track of my words–mostly because I was preoccupied with looking at the man’s face. But… the man listened to me patiently, without losing interest or focus.

Even after I finished talking, the man’s gaze did not drop from me. He stared at my eyes, my cheeks…even the hand that pressed to my chest.

While the man scanned my body, bit by bit, I awkwardly straightened my posture. Then, suddenly, it occurred to me that I didn’t know who this man was nor why he was here.

“E-Excuse me, but…”

“Yeah.”

“Who are you? This is… Moon Issak’s house.”

I didn’t know how to describe the expression the man made at that moment. Cold ridicule, anger, desolation, and melancholy all passed through the man’s face, one after another. In the end, he merely smiled calmly.

Then, with a slightly cracked voice, he replied, “My name is Seo Dawon. I… live nearby.”

“Huh…? Really?”

Upon hearing the man’s response, I looked around. I couldn’t see any other buildings adjacent to the wall we were leaning against, but a few upscale villas were visible just one block away.

Even so, there was something strange about him entering Moon Issak’s yard–especially since it was surrounded by a high fence, but…

‘Criminal… He doesn’t look like someone who would commit crimes.’

He didn’t look like a man who would do anything bad. Besides, if the man wanted to harm me, he would have had enough time to do that by now.

So, I relaxed a little as I spoke with him. There were questions I wanted to ask him earlier–questions that were circling my brain. “For some reason, I feel like I’ve heard your name before…”

“……”

“But, how pretty. Your name, too…”

The problem, though, was that I had voiced out loud my true feelings. It was only after I saw the man’s lips twitch that I realized what I had said; shame violently overtook me.

“Ah!, No… I mean…”

“Thank you.” Fortunately, the man named ‘Seo Dawon’ smiled softly without bringing attention to my foolish words.

When I saw his smile, I felt strange–like tears were welling up in my eyes. So, I took a deep breath to calm myself. Seo Dawon, without saying a word, looked at me as I sniffled. It was as if he knew exactly how I felt.

But, it would be weird for me to cry suddenly, so I started to say whatever I could; I needed to focus on another topic to shake off this gloomy mood. “T-There was something in my eyes…”

“……”

“Cough, cough… By the way, how old are you?”

“I’m the same age as you.”

“Ahhh…Huh? How do you know my age?”

“I just guessed,” Seo Dawon laughed.

I was momentarily dazed at that sight before laughing alongside him.

* * *

I was completely unaware of the flow of time as I talked with Seo Dawon. In addition to his extremely good looks, the man had the ability to make people feel at ease.

At certain times throughout the conversation, my tears poured out uncontrollably, even though I couldn’t understand why. However, Seo Dawon didn’t even point that out or soothe my sobs. He just kept watch over me, which allowed me to shake off my despondency and speak more without crying any further.

Seo Dawon showed deep interest in my words; his thoughtful attitude comforted me.

“Does your…left hand hurt a lot?” he asked.

“It hurts a little when it rains, but it’s okay now.”

“This hand… Did Moon Issak do this?”

“Yeah… But I’m relieved. He said he thought about making me unable to use my legs, but held it in.”

“……”

“And, I think he’s become a little more generous these days?”

“……”

“I-In any case, it’s all my fault…”

As I continued talking, Seo Dawon’s expression grew somber, but I kept laughing because I liked the way he gently stroked my left hand.

Seo Dawon’s hands were excessively cold, as if he had Raynaud’s, [1] but, excluding the temperature, holding hands with him felt really good. Seo Dawon seemed to be aware of my feelings, since he continued to hold my hand.

Then, upon seeing my fingers twitching due to a muscle spasm, Seo Dawon encouraged me to try and move them one by one. However, because the fingers had been severed and reattached, it had become quite challenging to move each one independently. Especially my fourth finger–it had been severed multiple times and had almost no sensation left.

After hearing that, Seo Dawon didn’t ask me to try and move them anymore. He simply lifted my hand and gently pressed his lips against my fourth finger before closing his mouth around it. I found it quite ticklish, but I didn’t ask him to stop.

As he continued to press his lips against my finger, he asked slowly, “Anywhere else besides your fingers?”

“Hm?”

“Does anywhere else hurt?”

“Nope. I’m alright.” I placed a hand near Seo Dawon’s eyes. His skin was white and nearly transparent under his eyes, but, somehow, it felt as if the man was shedding tears.

Tracing my finger over his dry cheek, I leaned closer to Seo Dawon. When I kissed his cheek, he didn’t pull away.

This was my first time kissing a man I had just met, yet I strangely felt no repulsion. Instead, my heart happily throbbed as if it had wanted to do this for a long time.

Creaaakk–

However, the moment our eyes met, I could hear the sound of Moon Issak’s car entering through the now-open gate.

In that instant, as soon as I heard the sound, I returned to my senses and quickly stood up from my seat. Overwhelmed by rising fear, I had no choice but to push Seo Dawon aside.

Without holding me back, Seo Dawon loosened his gentle grip on my hand.

“Ah, the ring…” I ran towards the mansion, leaving Seo Dawon behind me. When I reached the door, I remembered the ring Moon Issak had given me earlier–the very same ring I angrily threw out the window.

The headlights of the car in the parking lot had already been turned off. It wouldn't take Moon Issak more than five minutes to exit the lot. My hands trembled with fear as I looked between the darkened garden and parking lot.

It was then–

"Are you searching for this?" Seo Dawon's voice–I had completely forgotten about his presence–rang out, startling me. When I turned around, he was holding out a silver ring. Moon Issak's gift.

Seo Dawon approached my stiffened self and gently held my left hand. He then slowly placed the ring on the ring finger of my left hand. I looked down at the ring, unsure if my trembles were from fear or excitement.

However, something was strange.

The ring Moon Issak had given me during the day was a simple engagement ring made entirely of diamonds. However, the ring that Seo Dawon handed me had diamonds that exuded a reddish hue which slowly faded away.

When the light disappeared, the ring looked exactly like the ring I had abandoned earlier. Seo Dawon briefly kissed my forehead–which was furrowed in confusion–and whispered in a lowered voice, as if he were playing a prank, "It's gone–without a trace, right?" [2]

"Huh?"

"Moon Issak won't notice."

"Ah." I realized that Seo Dawon had helped me, and some of my extreme tension released. Seo Dawon placed his cold hands on my trembling shoulders and rubbed them a little.

I could finally take a deep breath and calm down. However, that wasn't the end. As I heard the sounds of Moon Issak's footsteps approaching on the

gravel path, Seo Dawon, with a smile on his face, promised me, “I’ll visit your room next time. When I knock on the door, open it for me.”

Then, he gave a brief kiss to my parted lips as I was about to respond. I closed my eyes for a moment and opened them again, but unfortunately, the ecstatic sensation had disappointingly vanished in that short period of time.

Like a dream one would have in the middle of the night.

——

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Choi Lee-kyung is extremely consistent–that boy definitely has a type.

Footnotes

1. Raynaud’s disease causes some areas of the body — such as fingers and toes — to feel numb and cold in response to cold temperatures or stress. In Raynaud’s disease, smaller arteries (or capillaries) that supply blood to the skin narrow, limiting blood flow and therefore heat circulation.
2. The original, (it’s like a persimmon), is a bit hard to explain. It refers to something that disappears without a trace–like a small

trinket or a pencil etc. Like magic. The etymology of the saying comes from how prized dried persimmons were in Korean folklore and Korean history. Basically, dried persimmons were sweet and delicious and used as treats to stop a crying child from crying. When the dried persimmon was eaten quickly so that there was no trace of it left, people would say . Therefore, when things have disappeared, someone would say “it’s like a persimmon–gone.”

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Chapter 339

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T.w. The biggest gaslighter in the history of gaslighters.

“What are you doing?”

The joy that filled my heart, however, was shattered by his blade-like voice. [1] . I was unable to continue recalling the sensation of Seo Dawon’s touch–his finger on my lips.

I lowered my finger and slowly looked back; Moon Issak scanned my body with piercing eyes. I smiled awkwardly to try and wash away his doubts, “I-I lost my ring…”

“Ring?”

“It’s a bit big, so… It fell off.”

“……”

“Still, I managed to find it.” With that said, I raised my left hand, inviting him to take a look. Only then did Moon Issak unfurrow his brows and raise his hand towards mine.

I wanted to ignore that detestable gesture, but my feet moved involuntarily. I reluctantly approached him. Moon Issak reached out with both hands and grabbed my face, which was now close to his. His palms were warm–possibly because he had been driving not too long ago. “How many hours did you search for this? You’re completely frozen.”

“What?”

“What a fool… You could have asked me to find it when I came back home.” Moon Issak also stroked my neck, as if to raise my body temperature. Then, he grasped my arm with reckless force. “Let’s go back in.”

“……” As I was dragged along by the investigator, I looked back.

Though I couldn’t see Seo Dawon, I kept staring at the dark shadows between the towering trees and bushes. It felt as if the man was watching me from somewhere the light couldn’t reach.

* * *

Despite my repeated assurances that I was fine, Moon Issak stubbornly poured water into cup ramen and handed it to me. I didn’t particularly like ramen, but Moon Issak often stocked the kitchen pantry with instant food–perhaps he actually enjoys that sort of food.

I silently watched as he poured hot water from the electric kettle in front of me. After setting up the hot water, he went up to the second floor. Soon afterwards, he appeared with a blanket in both hands.

As he placed the blanket over my shoulder, I complained quietly, “The blanket is going to get in the way when I’m eating…”

“You always just pick at the noodles anyway.”

“Because it’s not tasty…”

“You complain a lot for someone who lives on another’s charity.” Despite his mean words, he sat down in front of me.

I turned to avoid his gaze and blew on my noodles; as I ate the ramen, I was deep in thought. If it were Dawon, he would have made my favorite cream soup. Not some ramen, like this…

‘Hm?’

At that moment, the image of someone’s back–wearing an apron–flashed across my mind. Soon after, as if they were forcing their way in, thoughts of Moon Issak seeped through the cracks in my mind. I stopped resisting, pressing my hand against my throbbing temples.

After living with him for a month, I realized–though I knew little else about the man–that Moon Issak was a man with very few survival skills. It was amazing how he had survived thus far. The reason why he made me prepare all his meals was because Moon Issak didn’t know how to do anything but pour water into some cup ramen.

I pretended to focus solely on eating my cup ramen, ignoring the man sitting across from me. But suddenly, a thought came to mind, and I lifted my head. “Um… How do you feel about learning how to cook?”

Moon Issak stared into my eyes as if he were searching for an ulterior motive behind my question, “Why would I?”

“It’d be good for your health if you could eat your own home-cooked meals…?”

“You can do that for me.”

“I can’t cook for you every day.”

“……”

Did I make another mistake? I was a little scared when I saw his distorted expression.

It was obvious that he had noticed my hesitation. He glanced at my face; his mouth moved as if he were about to say something before he tightly sealed his lips once more. The investigator seemed to be holding back in his own way, but the atmosphere had already turned chilly due to his expression.

I couldn’t stomach any more ramen, but I stirred at the broth with the chopsticks.

Still staring at me, Moon Issak asked irritably, “Why do you always pick at your food?”

“…I don’t like Ramen.”

“Even if I buy you something else, you’ll just pick at that too.”

I recalled how Moon Issak would occasionally buy and bring home some late night snacks. He would pack things like chicken or salmon, which suited my taste buds a lot better than ramen. However, he kept urging me to eat faster, until I eventually vomited it all up.

Moon Issak told me to stop eating at night after I vomited; he blamed the time of day instead of his impatient urging. In the end, it was always all my fault.

“Despicable…” As those memories resurfaced and my annoyance at being falsely accused intensified, I inadvertently murmured curses at the investigator.

However, Moon Issak’s ears must have caught my quiet mumbles, “What was that?”

“It’s nothing.” I pretended that everything was alright while he glared at me in disbelief. However, he didn’t bother me anymore after that. Relieved, I took a small sip of the ramen broth–my tastebuds didn’t even register its taste.

“If you catch a cold tomorrow, I’m going to kill you.”

“……”

Of course, Moon Issak had to say something hurtful. I didn’t answer and merely shrugged my shoulders.

* * *

After finishing the cup noodles, I took a shower and reflected back on my day. I thought something fun had happened in the middle of the day, but I couldn’t remember what that was; so, I kept wiping at the guileless mirror. The foggy mirror felt like my own mind, hazy and unclear.

I did that for about half an hour. At that moment, Moon Issak swung open the unlocked bathroom door.

I shouted, irritated, “Leave! I’m washing up!”

“Are you going to wash all day?”

Moon Issak was like a prison warden. He had removed all the locks, so I couldn’t lock any of the doors in the space I was allowed to stay in.

According to him, he entered the bathroom during my showers because I might have another ‘seizure’ if I were left alone. But, since I had no

recollection of that ever happening, it just felt like he was violating my human rights.

It wasn't just once or twice that Moon Issak had barged into my shower session like this. Especially recently–he almost always barged in.

He claimed that he was worried about me, but, even after confirming I was fine, he would scan my body with a discomfiting gaze. Even now, he blatantly stared as I hurried to wear a shower robe.

'…How can a person like this still remain a civil servant and not be fired?'

However, Moon Issak, ignorant of my inner thoughts, approached me willfully. While opening the sliding doors to the cabinet, he asked, "Shall I dry your hair?"

"That's alright…"

"It'll take another hour if you try to do it yourself. I said I'll help, didn't I?"

"……"

"Your left hand is crippled, after all."

"Haah…" I let out a deep sigh and opened the string to my bathrobe. Taking my silence as consent, Moon Issak left the room to bring the hair dryer.

I followed him slowly, like a real prisoner. I knew that talking with him wouldn't change anything, but it was even more difficult than usual to endure his violence today.

'This isn't right… But, perhaps he just wants to dry my hair today.'

I gave up and resigned myself to my fate, sitting in the chair he had guided me to. Moon Issak ran his fingers through my hair, slowly sweeping from the crown of my head and adjusting the wind pressure as we went.

“……”

At the same time, he kept massaging my neck.

‘This perverted bastard…’

I cursed inwardly, but I couldn’t help but flinch every time his hand grazed past my ear. He moved leisurely, savoring my trembles. Then, rubbing and pressing at my shoulders, he said, “Choi Lee-kyung.”

“……”

“You know I’ve been generous with you, right?”

“……”

But, I thought that Moon Issak just did whatever he wanted…?

However, I really couldn’t stand it when he slid back the bathrobe that clung to my damp neck and spoke as if he was truly taking care of me. I jumped out of the seat, reflexively avoiding his hand.

Moon Issak smirked and turned off the dryer. Once the noise had disappeared, the room became eerily silent. He stared at my momentarily frightened expression and asked, “Why are you pretending to dislike it?”

“Are you crazy?” I couldn’t quite understand Moon Issak’s absurd attitude.

However, when he flicked his finger–

“Nngh…!” Immediately, my back bent; a strong impact slammed into my head. A fishy scent filled the air, and my nose started to sting.

I sat down, covering my nose, which had started bleeding. Moon Issak sauntered towards me leisurely, acting as if he hadn’t assaulted me. As he stood in front of me, he murmured to himself, “Why–why isn’t this working. In the first place, this was never meant to be a point of conflict.”

“Haah, haah…”

“If I desire it, you should be willing to tear out your heart and offer it to me. Spreading your legs should be easy.”

When I looked up, I saw Moon Issak’s furrowed, uncomprehending face.

To treat a person like this–beating them like a dog and mocking them–and yet acting as if I should naturally adore him… Moon Issak was nothing but a terrifying presence to me, and I had never voluntarily submitted to him even once.

However, Moon Issak merely tapped my knee with the tip of his shoe without understanding this obvious fact, “It’s not fun this way…”

With that said, he casually brushed aside his disheveled hair and continued to stare intently at me, who still had blood pouring from my nose. The animosity, hatred, and simmering anger within me were not hidden, and it seemed that Moon Issak was well aware of those emotions.

Moon Issak crouched down at a distance, trying to meet my gaze. “Choi Lee-kyung. I already told you that — and I should be treated as the same in your mind.”

“……”

“Why are you becoming even more disobedient?”

“……”

“You’ll only be tormented if you resist?”

Whenever Moon Issak spoke, my mind echoed with a ringing, buzzing sensation. However, I grit my teeth and endured the pain. Showing a pained expression would only bring joy to this sadist.

However, I didn’t want Moon Issak to continue hitting me for my refusal to submit. If I continued to endure this, it would come to a point where I couldn’t recover, both physically and mentally.

Though I hated Moon Issak, I had been trying to keep my intense hatred for him from occupying too much space in my heart. However, he will surely try to break me, no matter what it takes. This time, he may resort to such extreme violence that he could truly shatter my sanity.

'…What could he want?'

The question that lingered in my mind every day suddenly resurfaced. Moon Issak definitely wanted something from me–something my unconditional obedience could give him.

Then suddenly, I remembered the ring Moon Issak had placed on my finger. Despite the constant blood flow from my hand, I looked down at the ring on my left ring finger.

Drip–

A droplet from the nosebleed fell onto the ring; strangely enough, the diamond in the ring began to gradually turn pink. With each subsequent droplet, it grew even darker, as if it was absorbing my blood.

And, at that moment–

–Knock Knock–

I heard someone knocking on the door.

TL: If someone’s ever treating you like this, run away. Far.

Also, I like how Lee-kyung still has the prescience of mind to reject Moon Issak, no matter what. That must have taken a lot of mental and physical fortitude.

Footnotes

1. is, literally, ‘sharp blue.’ Basically, the word is describing the edge of a blade, and it’s used to refer to harsh or sharp things.

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Chapter 340

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It was a clear and eerie sound.

I raised my head.

Knock, knock–

The noise outside the door continued once again. If I didn’t hear wrong, then someone must be standing outside the room… How strange. Currently, only Kim Sangyoon and I lived here. A chill passed through me.

Strangely enough, Moon Issak continued to look at me without any reaction, as if he heard nothing.

“There’s a knock……”

“What?”

“Someone knocked on the door from outside the room…”

Upon hearing that, Moon Issak arched one eyebrow and stared at me for a moment. He then suddenly cupped my forehead with his big hand.

Frowning, he asked, “Are you feverish?”

“No…”

“If someone approached the door close enough to knock, how would I not notice?”

“……”

“I knew something like this would happen when you wandered around because you felt ‘stifled.'” He dismissed the sound I heard as some auditory hallucination.

Of course, I wasn’t convinced by that, but Moon Issak had already stood up and forcibly pulled my hand.

I couldn’t resist him and was soon dragged to the bed. I don’t know whether my blood loss or the rapid deterioration of my physical condition was to blame, but my head was spinning, and I felt dizzy.

Moon Issak embraced me lightly before laying me down on the bed. “Choi Lee-kyung. Starting today, going out to the garden is prohibited.”

“……”

As he said that, Moon Issak took out a handkerchief from his pocket and poured some potion onto it. Then, he used the damp cloth to wipe my bloody face.

Was this what it meant to ‘Give someone medicine after giving them the illness in the first place?’ I grumbled sarcastically to myself, but I kept my eyes focused on the door where I heard those knocks earlier. I couldn’t hear anything after Moon Issak moved me to the bed, but, somehow, I imagined that there was someone outside…waiting for the door to open.

Moon Issak sighed briefly after wiping my face with the potion; he seemed to realize where my distracted thoughts were.

After throwing his handkerchief to the ground, he suddenly stood up and strode to the entrance of the room; the man flung the door open without any warning. From my viewpoint, I could see the corridor beyond.

And, there…

“Fine–are you satisfied?”

“……”

“Someone knocked on the door, hm? There’s no one there, right?”

Contrary to Moon Issak’s words, someone was standing there.

My eyes opened wide. An impossibly handsome–and somehow familiar–man stood right outside the door frame, staring back at me.

Despite the undeniable presence of such a distinctive person that could hardly be ignored, Moon Issak continued to habitually berate me as if he couldn’t see the man. “Didn’t I tell you? You’ve got awful senses.”

[Lee-kyung-ah.]

The man called my name in a sweet and low voice–honeyed enough for me to forget about Moon Issak’s verbal abuse. As I stared at the man, I almost forgot how to breathe.

“From now on, don’t doubt my words and follow my orders. Do you understand?” Moon Issak ranted.

[You have to let me in.]

I looked between Moon Issak and the man standing beyond the doorway. The two of them merely stared at me without being conscious of each other.

Soon, Moon Issak seemed to realize that something was strange. He approached me with a frown on his face.

Although I could see him step closer, I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the man at the door. However, Moon Issak soon forced me to look at him by grabbing my collar, “Choi Lee-kyung, what are you looking at?”

“I… I…”

[Lee-kyung-ah, I told you earlier, right? Call my name.]

Even at this moment, his desperate and mellow voice tickled my ears even though his body was hidden by Moon Issak’s towering stature.

I was suddenly afraid.

Have I gone mad? Was it as Moon Issak said? That my judgment was somehow impaired? As that thought crossed my mind, a lump formed in my throat; I held my head, feeling confused by the apparition of the man beyond the door.

That man… who on earth was he? I didn’t even know his name. I don’t even remember anyone with that face. But…

“Ah…”

“What are you doing?”

Slap–!

“Pay attention, hm?”

“Ungh…”

Moon Issak roughly slapped me on the cheek when I couldn’t return to my senses. Then, he fixed his gaze–those detestable sharp eyes–on me.

Moon Issak began to torture me by implanting the visual image of worms crawling through my head. Plagued by these illusions, I cried and scratched at my head with my fingernails. At some point, I realized that the man who stood behind Moon Issak was no longer visible. No matter how many times I blinked, the figure that once filled the doorway was now completely gone.

“Do your eyes work properly now?” Moon Issak asked.

“…….”

Emotions surged within me–was it relief or disappointment?

However, Moon Issak showed no consideration for my subdued, silent self. He brutally grabbed my chin and continued to force my eyes to meet his. This time, though, he didn’t plan on giving any painful delusions; however, it felt as if all my thoughts–everything in my head–was being scrutinized.

Moon Issak delved into my mind, rummaging through it freely. He frowned and eventually averted his gaze. With a perplexed look on his face, he struggled to contain himself and pushed me back onto the bed.

“Nngh…” I groaned.

“Don’t make me annoyed. If you want to be turned into a dimwit, feel free to continue.”

“…….”

“From tomorrow onwards, I should ban you from meeting Kim Sangyoon as well.”

Even though my entire body throbbed and ached, my head raised up at those words. I knew well that I was held captive in this place for the sake of Kim Sangyoon’s recovery, but it was excessively cruel for Moon Issak to forbid me from meeting the Warrior.

I barely managed to hold his hand and begged, “Why…Why won’t you let me meet him?”

“You had strange thoughts right now, didn’t you?”

“But… But…”

“I told you to pull yourself together, didn’t I?”

“I… I will. So, let me continue seeing Sangyoon-ssi. Please…”

“No? You’re still not alright in the head. Visual and auditory hallucinations… If Kim Sangyoon wakes up, you’ll have all new delusions as well.” Moon Issak answered, each word driving wedges into my blinking self. “It’s because you’re so unstable that I’m stopping him from waking up.”

“…What?” I looked at him in surprise, reading between the lines of his words.

He continued calmly, staring at my shocked face, “Why are you so surprised? Did you really think Kim Sangyoon wasn’t waking because he was too ill or hurt?”

“Then… Y-you deliberately… kept him unconscious?” I felt a suffocating anger throttle my throat; my earlier assumptions were proven true. However, Moon Issak maintained an indifferent expression, as if he were watching a struggling bug.

I had been trying to endure Moon Issak’s harassment and violence all for Kim Sangyoon… That gaze felt like pure mockery of my struggle.

But before I could shout at him, Moon Issak shamelessly opened his mouth once more. His voice was disgustingly condescending; he even let out a small sigh as if he were a teacher dealing with a misbehaving student. “Haah… Choi Lee-kyung. How many times do I have to tell you? You brought this all on yourself.”

“What…?”

“Because you were uncooperative, Kim Sangyoon wasn’t able to wake up and withered away.”

“What…!”

“You didn’t trust me.” With his arms crossed, he looked down at me with an overbearing look. “Think about why Kim Sangyoon was injured in the first place. That’s your fault as well, hm?”

“……”

“But you couldn’t even fully open your heart and obey me. Didn’t you realize that Kim Sang-yoon’s life was in my hands?”

“…Enough…”

“So, is it unfair for me to call you selfish? I’m just stating facts.”

“Stop it…!”

His words were like battering rams against my heart, shattering it into pieces. It was similar to the feeling of a cold, sharp blade plunging itself into my chest.

My mind went blank, and I couldn’t resist Moon Isak’s words. Everything was my fault, and to save Kim Sangyoon, I had to… give up. I didn’t even know what I had to give up, but it felt like I should let go of whatever I was desperately holding onto.

It didn’t suit me…It’s too much… Yeah… I had been that way for a long time…

“It’s all greed, Choi Lee-kyung.” Moon Issak said.

“……”

“Such power doesn’t suit someone of your level–it doesn’t suit you.”

“……”

“Look, what can you possibly do alone?” Moon Isak grabbed my neck. Slowly tightening his grip, he declared, “This is your fate–to be broken like this.”

Suddenly, the ring finger of my left hand began to heat up, as if it opposed Moon Issak’s words.

I turned my fidgety gaze towards my hand. And there, upon the crumpled finger where the ring was supposed to be, a shining sentence appeared.

“…Ah.” I gasped in pain. Simultaneously, I felt the black fog in my head being washed away.

“Have you gone crazy?” When he saw the corners of my lips quirking up into a smile, Moon Issak released the strength in his fingers. Perhaps he thought I wasn’t receiving enough oxygen.

That was Moon Issak’s downfall. As soon as I was released from his grasp, my now violet lips moved, “[Seo Dawon].”

“…What?”

My voice didn’t come out clearly because I had just been strangled, but I knew well… I knew that my summons didn’t actually need my voice to be audible. What I needed was blood and my desire for revenge.

“Choi Lee-kyung, what did you say?”

“You should have… cut off… my tongue, instead…”

“What the…” Moon Issak couldn’t understand the meaning behind my words and pulled my collar, brows wrinkled. Thanks to that, only I could see the darkness rising up from behind him.

Become a Patron!

TL: You have no idea how triumphant I felt for Lee-kyung at this moment. Like I know we all shit on Lee-kyung’s game sense, but you gotta say… this boy has emotional strength in spades.

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Blink–

As soon as Moon Issak realized something strange was happening and turned around to look, but the room suddenly went dark. I had no idea what happened at that moment.

However, when the lights came back on, I was comfortably ensconced in familiar arms, free from Moon Issak's detestable grip.

"Dawon-ah!"

"……"

"Seo Dawon?" Filled with joy, I tried to look back, but Moon Issak's chilling cry cut me off. He scowled at the space behind me–glaring at Seo Dawon–with a shocked expression.

Dawon ignored Moon Issak's bloodlust and gripped me even tighter; something cold touched the nape of my neck.

I wanted to see Seo Dawon's face, but I could only look straight forward. The Mage breathed deeply, and there was so much emotion in each silent inhale. I couldn't bear to tell him that his embrace was too tight.

“Haah… How dare an undead enter my sanctuary?”

“……”

“I guess your brain rotted after you died, hm?” Moon Issak cleaved through the silence with his furious shouts.

His face was distorted with rage–to an intensity I had not seen before. He looked back and forth between Seo Dawon and me. Then, he raised his right hand above my chest, and as he did, stigmatas appeared on the back of his hand. [1] I felt a tingling sensation creeping across my skin.

My anxiety started to build and I tightly gripped Seo Dawon’s hands around my waist. Only then did Dawon slowly release his embrace.

“Dawon…” I started.

“Wait a minute.”

“…Huh?”

The Mage gently cut me off, and stood in front of me without showing me his face.

As soon as Seo Dawon stepped forward, Moon Issak’s black hair began to shine silver, as if it were reacting to his presence. Not only that, but after Moon Issak briefly closed and reopened his eyes, his irises glowed mysteriously. It was like the sparkling opalescent eyes Han Kiseok had shown me when showcasing his attributes as a Mage of the ‘Rationality’ skill tree.

In addition, Moon Issak’s feet were floating 10 centimeters above ground. However, Seo Dawon was unaffected by this unusual change and calmly raised one hand.

It seemed that Seo Dawon’s steady calmness was an unendurable provocation for the investigator. Moon Issak glared at me from beyond the

mage, smiled, and began to speak vulgarly, “Choi Lee-kyung, you were so cute. Your crying face is really my cup of tea.”

“……”

“Why–are you feeling a little uncomfortable because I used him a little?”

“……”

“Haha! Seo Dawon, I never thought I’d see the day when you’d make an expression like that, hm?”

I didn’t know everything Moon Issak had done to me; my memories were still sparse and patchy. The events that occurred while I was under Moon Issak’s control remained blurry, buried in the depths of my memory.

I shuddered when I recalled those fragmented days–days where I felt completely disassociated from the passage of time. Anger and pain rose within me; I wanted to spit in that mocking bastard’s face.

“[Blizzard].” However, Dawon had been ignoring Moon Issak and instead preparing his own skills. I pressed down on my desire to retort and stepped back.

Moon Issak, with that discomfiting smile still on his face, quickly rushed at Seo Dawon. “[Blessing Counter].”

“……!” I was on the verge of screaming as I witnessed their confrontation. Moon Issak, as if using the [Blink] skill, constantly evaded the range of Dawon’s skills and rushed towards the Mage.

On the other hand, Seo Dawon continued to respond half a beat behind. And finally, Moon Issak’s hands, bathed in white light, firmly grasped Dawon from behind. I looked in despair at Dawon’s arm, which was missing below the elbow.

Moon Issak made a triumphant expression when the Mage stumbled, “No matter how strong an undead you may be, you must know that you

can’t recover in a sacred field, right?”

“……”

“Look carefully, Choi Lee-kyung. Don’t turn away.” As he spoke, Moon Issak raised his arm high.

Of course, I tried not to fall for his provocation. However, he was right: the fact that Dawon’s cut arm hadn’t recovered felt somewhat ominous.

‘No way… Is Dawon-ie being forced to fight a futile battle just because I summoned him?’

I bit at the tips of my nails as I stared at Seo Dawon’s back; the mage was shaken by Moon Issak’s attack.

Perhaps I called for him when he wasn’t yet ready. Moon Issak’s attacks kept narrowly brushing past the Mage.

I tried to endure, but, when Seo Dawon’s left ear was torn off, I eventually couldn’t hold it in anymore and opened my mouth.

‘I need to call on another Servant.’

The problem, however, was whether or not I was in a state where I could handle calling two or more servants without succumbing to the drain on my vitality. Even I had to admit that my current physical condition was the worst it had been in a long while, so I wasn’t sure how many minutes I could maintain a dual summon.

However, when Moon Issak grabbed Dawon by the neck, I instinctively began to call out Kim Olim’s name. “[Kim Ol—.]”

“You can’t, Lee-kyung-ah.” Seo Dawon immediately stopped me.

Seo Dawon spoke clearly, as if he wasn’t being strangled, despite Moon Issak’s tight grip on his throat. Still, he wouldn’t look at me.

The strange and ominous feeling that had settled over the Mage seemed to have reached Moon Issak as well. With a cruel smile on his face, exerting so much strength that the veins in his hands stood out, the investigator's eyes widened for a moment and mumbled, "What on…? This…?"

His words soon trailed off. At the very next moment, blood began spurting out of Moon Issak's body like a fountain.

I witnessed one of Moon Issak's arms silently being severed and falling smoothly to the ground. At the same time, his left ear was sharply torn. I realized that the wounds inflicted on him were the same wounds Dawon had suffered. As I looked between them, I could see their injuries were almost mirror images of each other.

"Fucker. Seo Dawon, you… What the hell have you done to me?!"

"……"

Moon Issak was clearly agitated. After spewing profanities, he raised his intact hand and reattached the severed arm. This sight wasn't unfamiliar to me, as I had witnessed the clean regenerative abilities of a priest during the battle with Bae Jaemin.

However, I was surprised to see that Seo Dawon's arm, which was left behind–far away–during their battle, had suddenly reattached and became intact as well. Moon Issak also paled a little at that. He could no longer muster the sly smile that he had displayed at the advent of this conflict.

However, he soon hid that agitation and told Seo Dawon, "How long will you continue with that crude deception?"

"What about you? You're the one who used hypnosis." Seo Dawon retorted with a low growl and a sneer. Moon Issak lifted his head and glared at me for a moment, but soon he charged at the Mage once more.

The battle continued at a sluggish pace.

Whenever Moon Issak attacked Seo Dawon, the Mage hardly reacted and simply took the hits. Then, after about two minutes, the same wounds would appear on Moon Issak's body. When Moon Issak healed those wounds, the mirroring wounds on Dawon's body also healed simultaneously. Naturally, in this situation, Moon Issak couldn't attack boldly.

"How long are you going to keep up with this nonsense?!" Moon Issak continued to attack while airing his grievances. But, eventually, he stepped back and vented his anger in full because he couldn't find a way to break this stalemate. His face was swollen with frustration.

Seo Dawon stood silently, without answering. Moreover, from that moment on, he didn't even bother defending himself, just allowing Moon Issak to land his skills without any resistance.

It was as if the Mage was demonstrating that those attacks would always rebound back onto the investigator. At that time, Moon Issak, driven into a frenzy, plunged his fist through the reactionless Mage's abdomen. However, he soon spat out vivid crimson blood as the same amount of force had now struck his own stomach.

"This… Fucker…" Eventually, Moon Issak staggered away from Seo Dawon.

However, something was strange. Seo Dawon stood still, merely staring at Moon Issak, but Moon Issak continued to engage in a battle of words with Seo Dawon, even though Seo Dawon wasn't responding.

"…What's going on?"

"Well, since it seems like he enjoys hypnosis…"

"Argh!" I turned around, startled, when I heard the Mage's voice behind me.

There he stood, perfectly fine and looking down at me. I widened my eyes and alternated my gaze between the Dawon in front of me and the

Dawon behind me.

Become a Patron!

TL: Um? Excuse me, Mr. Moon Issak? What do you mean “used him a little?”

Footnotes

1. Wounds inflicted on Christ’s body at the time of his crucifixion. Or wounds that are said to have been created on the body by a mysterious force that cannot be scientifically explained.

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Chapter 342

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There were subtle differences when I looked closely.

The Dawon who was standing in front of me and the Dawon Moon Issak was facing were slightly different in appearance. The Seo Dawon that was being attacked relentlessly by Moon Issak was smaller in size; his movements were stiffer.

"……!" The more I observed, the stranger this was. So, I decided to focus on it again but this time, with more scrutiny. Surprisingly, the Seo Dawon that was engaged in battle was actually just a scarecrow with the Mage's name on its face! Until now, I definitely thought that the scarecrow was Seo Dawon, so I became utterly confused and doubted everything in view.

In particular, I found it quite creepy to see Moon Issak so immersed in attacking that wooden figure with his eyes wide open. He even beat that Seo Dawon imitation until his fist was covered in blood.

"That's….?" I started to ask.

However, unlike my astonishment, Dawon-ie's face was devoid of emotion. There was no sign of joy or satisfaction in overpowering Moon Issak.

In a flash, he turned his gaze towards me as I stared at him. But even that eye contact was brief as Dawon immediately reached out and pulled me into his embrace. I went along without resisting, obediently being drawn into his hug. Unlike when Moon Issak touched me, my heart began to thump.

I buried my head in his arms and hugged him to my heart's content, breathing in and savoring this rare affectionate touch. This cold temperature and his unique scent–something that I hadn't smelled in a long time–eased all of my tension.

However, Seo Dawon's arms, locking me in like a jail, grew tighter and tighter without releasing me.

"It hurts, Dawon-ah…"

"……"

I thought it might be his way of showing affection, so I chuckled as I complained and pouted, but Seo Dawon's expression remained quite unusual even as he saw my smiling face.

Seo Dawon sighed deeply as if he were suppressing something; his gaze clung to my forehead, eyes, and nose.

'…Is he angry?'

That thought immediately led to something pessimistic: 'Is it because of me?' I flinched back; Seo Dawon gently bowed his head, as if he had perceived my anxiety, and his lips touched my eyes. From the moment his lips touched me, my face burned.

But for some reason, Dawon's expression became even more emotionless when he pulled his lips away. It was at that moment that I felt a strange uneasiness on his face.

"You are…!" Suddenly, someone came into the room, shouting.

I whirled around, surprised; Da-hee stood by the door with a pale face, looking between us and Moon Issak. Furthermore, once she noticed the Mage, she couldn’t take her eyes off of Seo Dawon’s face–perhaps she recognized him immediately.

“So, you came here on your own. I’m glad–it’s less troublesome that way,” Seo Dawon said.

“……!”

After speaking, Dawon-ie coldly glanced at her and raised his hand. Then, as if golden flowers were blooming simultaneously, the room filled with golden magic circles.

As soon as that happened, Da-hee’s complexion grew even paler. But, instead of fleeing, she stood in front of us and opened her hands–palms towards us with her fingers extended. Upon closer inspection, I noticed faint silver threads–barely visible as long as one concentrated–tied to each joint of her fingers.

“…I’m sorry to have come across you like this.” She said.

“Really? You look too ready to die for someone who says something like that.”

Da-hee opened and closed her lips, as if she had something more to say but instead of continuing to speak, she looked at me for a moment. It looked as if she desperately wanted my help.

Although my heart was moved by Da-hee’s previously kind attitude, I honestly couldn’t side with her and support Moon Issak in this situation. My heart grew heavy, but I made an effort to avoid her gaze.

At that moment, Seo Dawon suddenly warned Da-hee-ssi in a stern, low voice, “Don’t cling to Choi Lee-kyung.”

“I…”

“I know why you’re stuck to Moon Issak’s side. Moon Issak must have promised you a very useful skill once he’s coronated as the Pope.”

“……!”

“I’m talking about [Resurrection].”

Upon hearing the Mage’s words, I instinctively raised my head and looked at Da-hee-ssi.

[Resurrection] was a skill that could resurrect the dead. Unlike the necromancer skill that could only raise the undead, the Pope could literally bring about a ‘complete resurrection.’

This skill was a ‘known entity’ inside the hub. The High Priest’s Basic Skill book even made references to and contained a brief description of [Resurrection].

However, there wasn’t any news yet that [Resurrection] had actually been achieved. So, this skill was nothing short of a dream or a fantasy skill for a Priest–stuff like ‘I can escape death if I have [Resurrection]. However, I didn’t expect [Resurrection] to be a scenario reward for when one becomes a Pope.

Da-hee’s expression became cold at Seo Dawon’s words. She bent her fingers one by one as she glared at him, “Don’t sneer at me. You… Aren’t you also begging Choi Lee-kyung for help because you couldn’t accept death?”

“……”

“I also just couldn’t let go.” Da-hee’s eyes became a little moist as she spoke. She then dropped her hand towards the floor, as if she were playing the piano.

Immediately, a translucent, white line slowly began to fall from her hand to the floor. Subsequently, a silver summoning circle unfurled on the ground; intricate patterns intertwined and interlocked with one another.

I felt amazed when I saw a ‘doll’ slowly being summoned, its head rising up from the ground.

‘Isn’t that a person…?’

If it weren’t for the silver threads connecting to it, the figure could easily be mistaken for a person with closed eyes. The doll was a blonde, tall man– despite being summoned, it looked so suspiciously lifelike. Almost like a living, breathing, human being.

Flick–!

However, as soon as the doll’s eyes opened accompanied by the sound of a finger flick, those thoughts vanished. A sheen unique to inanimate objects shone from its glass marble eyes.

Looking at the doll, Seo Dawon sneered coldly. “Oh my–I see I’m in the presence of a true necromancer.”

“……”

Da-hee-ssi didn’t answer; she bit her lips. Thereafter, the doll, with its eyes wide open, began to move as if it were a living human being.

As she flicked her fingers–like striking piano keys–the doll skillfully drew the sword that was fastened on its waist. An unusual, rippling, blue energy formed on the blade.

‘No way… A Swordmaster…?’

I was well aware of the fact that only a few exceptionally talented individuals among the Warrior class could produce such a phenomenon called “Sword Aura.” After all, I had seen plenty of videos on the internet showcasing the manipulation of Sword Aura.

That sword aura must not be a mere visual trick. The doll lowered its posture and raised its sword towards the Mage. Just by taking that stance, I could feel the pressure the aura exuded–as if a blade was drawn against my neck.

And, when I blinked–

Boom–!

In an instant, the doll rushed right in front of us, unleashing tendrils of bluish Sword Aura. Fortunately, it was blocked by a shield that Seo Dawon seemed to have conjured, so it couldn't harm us any further.

I heard a crackling sound as I glimpsed the faint outline of the shield blocking the sword aura. The barrier felt too thin to prevent the blue aura; I couldn't tear my eyes away because I was worried the shield would break.

However, Seo Dawon didn't abandon me and simply hugged me tighter. He used one cold hand to grab the nape of my neck before using the other to completely envelop me in his embrace.

"W-Will it be alright?" I asked.

"……"

I worried that our posture would only be a hindrance. With my lips resting on his collarbone, I voiced my concern; I didn't want to see him get hurt while trying to protect me.

However, Dawon-ie merely stroked the back of my head without saying a word. I glanced at him; without staring back, he responded, "Are you worried that I'll lose?"

"N-No… It's not that…"

“Actually, I’m a bit scared.”

“Huh?”

“I have to fight against a woman who made her dead boyfriend into a weapon… How dreary.”

“What?”

Taken aback, I turned around. There, I saw Da-hee-ssi staring at me with a pale face. When I observed her expression, I realized that what Seo Dawon had said was true.

“Isn’t that chilling?” The Mage whispered.

“……”

However, Seo Dawon continued to hug me with one arm, as if he were making a joke. In a clearly provoking tone, he called out to her, “Did you really believe that Moon Issak would resurrect that preservative-laden fleshbag?”

Become a Patron!

TL: Ngl, turning your dead boyfriend into a puppet is both tragic and horrifying at the same time. But I guess tragically horrifying is the norm for a lot of characters in this novel.

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Chapter 343

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Da-hee-ssi’s eyes changed when she heard those words.

Deep anger, guilt, and melancholy disappeared; she became expressionless. It seems Seo Dawon had hit a sore point.

“I didn’t expect to hear something like that from an undead. Perhaps you don’t fully grasp the situation.” Da-hee-ssi muttered as she raised her left hand. Answering her call, the blond man posed as if he were ready to walk.

Da-hee-ssi openly ridiculed him with her cynical remarks, “If Jae-ho is a fleshbag full of preservatives, then what are you? You didn’t even leave any flesh behind.”

However, disregarding her provocation, Seo Dawon smiled refreshingly, “Haha, what kind of joke is that? Lee Jae-ho and I are completely different. I chose this state voluntarily, but… what you’re doing is humiliating the dead, right?”

“…Shut up!” Eventually, Da-hee-ssi lost her composure and attacked Seo Dawon.

The blonde man–that is to say, the man that was once Lee Jae-ho, reacted immediately to Da-hee-ssi’s shout, jumping to a height that would have made him almost invisible to an ordinary person, before flinging his sword aura towards the top of Dawon-ie’s head.

I instinctively flinched, but I couldn’t move my body because the Mage’s arms were holding me tightly. Dawon-ie patted me with his hands as if to reassure me.

“[Hellfire].” He immediately unfurled a large-scale magic attack that seemed to have been prepared in advance. As soon as the skill was called out, a darkness that one wouldn’t dare stare into–like a black hole opening its maw on the floor–appeared.

“[Perfect Barrier].” Afterwards, Dawon-ie summoned a large shield and placed it in front of me. Lee Jae-ho’s attack was blocked by that shield, and the puppet was unable to further its attack.

Screeeech–!

Its blade scraped sharply against the shield, but the winner of the power struggle was Seo Dawon. Da-hee, realizing that the shield was too strong to penetrate, glared at us before waving her hand. Lee Jae-ho retreated.

That’s when the unexpected happened.

As soon as Lee Jae-ho stepped back and its feet touched the floor, something black and sticky began to cling to its shoes.

At first, I had no idea what that was, but I soon found out. Black smoke began to billow out, and Lee Jae-ho’s body caught on fire. The flames of hell summoned by [Hellfire] began to devour its body.

At first, it was a very insignificant flame, so the puppet didn’t care about it; but, as Lee Jae-ho continued to move, the flame crawled up its body like a snake. Until its calves, the flames burned quite slowly; past the thighs, its whole body suddenly burst into flames as if someone had poured oil all over its torso.

Da-hee-ssi screamed in horror at the sight, “No!!”

She desperately tried to put out the fire on Lee Jae-ho's body by fanning her hands, but the flames only burned brighter as it used the puppet's body as fuel.

In the end, Da-hee-ssi, with tears streaming down her face, reached out her hands to directly touch Jaeho's burning body. And, horrifically, the flames transferred to her hands.

"No! No!! Arghh!"

But, even as her own hands were engulfed by the flames, Da-hee-ssi was more concerned with the flames on Lee Jae-ho's body. She tried to rescue the puppet's melting body from the fire, but strangely the flames didn't transfer onto the rest of her body.

However, her hands soon began to burn black as she tried to bat away the flames with both hands to save Lee Jae-ho.

Da-hee-ssi completely lost her sanity as she witnessed her lover being reduced to a pile of ashes by the relentless flames that refused to extinguish. "Stop it! I said, stop!! AghhhH!!"

"……"

"No! NO!!! Please!"

I couldn't bear to watch anymore, so I eventually turned my head away. They weren't pitiful or anything…It was just too difficult to watch until the bitter end; I stood arms crossed as if I wasn't affected.

However, Seo Dawon left it like that for a few seconds, and only when Lee Jae-ho had almost completely burned away into a pile of ash did he stop the skill's progression with a flick of his finger.

I thought Seo Dawon had timed it that way in order to interrogate Da-hee-ssi. But, when I looked up at his face, I realized that I thought wrong.

"Dawon-ah…"

Seo Dawon was smiling.

In particular, his cruel smile was fixed upon Lee Da-hee who had lost her mind as she stared vacantly at Lee Jae-ho. He was savoring her expression, as if her despair was a sweet dessert.

Ignoring me, Seo Dawon whispered to Da-hee-ssi, “Ask Moon Issak.”

“……”

“Let’s see if he can save that pile of ashes.”

Da-hee-ssi raised her vacant eyes and stared at Seo Dawon. Then, behind our backs, I heard Moon Issak roar, “Seo Dawon–!”

It seemed that he had finally been released from the Mage’s hypnosis.

Moon Issak kicked away the completely shattered scarecrow with his foot and approached us, visibly angry. After regaining his composure and surveying the surroundings, he paused for a moment when he saw Dahee sitting there. The investigator seemed to be trying to assess the situation.

The words that soon fell from his lips were so cold that I could hardly believe the two were on the same side. “What a fool… You should have dragged Kim Sangyoon out and taken him hostage to buy time.”

“……”

“Useless. You or anyone else.”

That was truly a line that a despicable villain might spout. How did this world become so twisted that a thug like that received a scenario that may reward him with becoming a pope.

After making such a shameless remark, Moon Issak stretched his body; there was a cracking sound as he turned his neck from side to side. Then, he stared at Seo Dawon with narrowed eyes.

It didn’t stop there. He glared at me, still deep in Seo Dawon’s embrace. The investigator’s gaze was even more relentless than when he looked at Seo Dawon.

I involuntarily grit my teeth at Moon Issak’s persistent, sticky gaze. Seo Dawon quickly shifted his body to block that gaze.

“Choi Lee-kyung…”

Through my blocked perspective, I could hear Moon Issak’s simmering voice.

I strained my ears to follow his voice, but I couldn’t understand him. I had given up on understanding the man, but when our eyes met earlier, Moon Issak had glared at me as if I had betrayed him and had an affair with Seo Dawon.

‘Resentment…’

Clearly, there was more than just anger in him. His shameless gaze exuded his resentment and obsession towards me.

How unfair. Even when I had lost my memory, I had no relationship with Moon Issak. As my foggy mind gradually cleared after meeting Dawon, the memories of our time together started to emerge. They were filled with nothing but pain and shame.

However, that only reaffirmed the fact that he enjoyed the violence–all those moments I felt stifled and suffocated… enough for him to feel ‘betrayed’.

The overwhelming difference in our positions and perspectives shattered all my efforts to avoid thinking deeply, dragging me into a vortex of hatred. The days when I helplessly succumbed to Moon Issak kept becoming more vivid in my mind.

‘I want to kill him…’

The most terrible thing he would do was to appropriate and disguise himself within my memories of Seo Dawon and hit me. Whenever I was slapped around or treated like a tool by someone I liked without knowing the reasons why, I had shed incredibly sorrowful tears. And, Moon Issak would take pleasure in my tears each and every time.

"Hooo…" However, I tried to cut off such thoughts. I didn't want to shed any more tears over that man. Instead of crying, I bowed my head and regained my composure in Seo Dawon's stable arms.

From that moment on, the bloodlust pouring from Moon Issak became even more intense. In a growling, sinister voice, he threatened, "You'll never be able to leave the basement for the rest of your life."

I trembled because I remembered the basement that Moon Issak was referring to. I was very frightened, and I also felt ashamed of myself for being afraid.

However, I clenched my teeth and retorted, "Let's see who rots underground forever."

As soon as I finished speaking, Moon Issak laughed despicably, "Are you all fired up because you managed to summon Seo Dawon? Just him? How cute."

Then, after a pause, he continued meaningfully, "You personally told me your weakness–you can't summon for an extended period of time."

"……!"

"I'll win just by dragging time. Isn't that right, Lee-kyung-ah?"

Become a Patron!

TL: First things first: Holy shit, absolutely COLD from Seo Dawon. Although, I'm glad he did it. I know Da-hee was "kind" to Lee-kyung, but she wasn't kind enough to stop Moon Issak from "using" Lee-kyung.

Second–Moon Issak truly is every toxic ex-boyfriend ever, huh?

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Chapter 344

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As soon as I heard the noise, I had a terrible headache.

Although I knew I shouldn’t speak about my abilities when Moon Issak asked, I answered him immediately. He didn’t even need to threaten me–I couldn’t stop myself from answering.

At first, our conversations were casual. For example, he asked about where my hometown was. But at some point, he began extracting information that should never have fallen into the enemy’s hands. He pried out details such as how I met Seo Dawon, how many contracted servants I had, and even the critical risks associated with my abilities.

He had even dug into Kim Sangyoon and Koo Hui-seo…I remembered how interested Moon Issak was in the fact that Koo Kyungman was still alive.

He cleverly extracted that information before messing with my memory once more, making me forget that I had ever told him anything.

Later on, when his hypnotic suggestions were broken, my memories flooded my mind. I felt suffocated. It wasn’t just ‘some guy’ or ‘some enemy.’ I had handed all my information to Moon Issak.

‘I…’

It wasn’t just the servants; Kim Sangyoon and Koo Hui-seo were also in danger.

As if he had guessed the reason behind my shock, Moon Issak smiled sinisterly, “Now that your memory has returned, you understand. Right? Even if you’re lucky enough to kill me and run away, your entire arsenal has already been exposed.”

“…….”

“And, if I die, everything you said has been recorded; a trusted colleague has the recorded files. We’ve arranged for the documents to be sent to at least three people.”

Moon Issak wasn’t bluffing. Rather, perhaps he had already finished negotiating matters with Bae Jaemin using the information he had received from me. After all, I had been stuck in this mansion for about a month now.

In other words, I was completely trapped.

Whether or not I kill Moon Issak here, I’ll become a wanted criminal even if I managed to escape. Koo Hui-seo may be thrown into jail because of my testimony. Furthermore, Kim Sangyoon, who still needed treatment, would face a bleak future. However…if I followed Moon Issak’s words and canceled Seo Dawon’s summon, I wouldn’t be able to prevent the investigator from doing whatever he pleases.

At that time, Moon Issak spoke in a softer voice, crooning as if he were trying to coax me further into this dilemma, “Choi Lee-kyung, think carefully. You simply have to swear that you’ll cooperate with my scenario. This wouldn’t be a bad option for you as well. If I become the Pope and use [Resurrection], I can revive Seo Dawon.”

“……”

“In some ways, we share a common purpose. I don’t mind signing a contract with the condition of Seo Dawon’s resurrection if that’s what you want.”

"……"

"Rather than struggling on your own when you aren't even capable…."

It was then–

"I was wondering, but… You're truly screwed, aren't you?" Dawon-ie, who had just been listening, cut off Moon Issak. In addition, there was a strange expression on his face, as if he were holding back his laughter.

I had no idea what Dawon-ie was talking about, so I looked at Moon Issak through the gap in the Mage's arms. At first glance, Moon Issak didn't seem to have undergone any significant changes. His expression was a bit colder, but that was similar to his usual demeanor.

As if he had come to the same conclusion, Moon Issak also raised one eyebrow. He must have found those words quite absurd, "Can't you distinguish where a servant should interfere, and where he shouldn't?"

He didn't hide his contempt for Dawon. It was as if he found the Mage presumptuous for even daring to speak.

Moon Issak's attitude confirmed that his wheedling promises wouldn't be kept; the man despised Seo Dawon that much.

However, Dawon's smile only grew deeper despite the obvious hostility. "If I'm not here, you'll hypnotize Lee-kyung-ie… Well, even if what you did was dirty, I can understand the desire to monopolize him… However, you're already finished, hm?"

"…What?"

"Did you know that the Hub categorizes hypnosis as a type of attack?" Dawon spoke softly, as if he were a teacher explaining a problem to an ignorant student. Moon Issak didn't seem to understand; I didn't either.

'Hypnosis is considered an attack…? What does that mean?'

Since I’ve been hypnotized, I can personally understand the concept that hypnotism could be considered an attack skill. However, why was it necessary to clarify and categorize it in such a manner?

Moon Issak tried to demolish my ego with hypnosis and inflicted injury on my body without any hesitation. But, if I were to say ‘That’s an attack skill,’ there’s no way he would change his methods and avoid using hypnosis.

Moon Issak’s position as an investigator–a public official–was the reason why he was able to use hypnosis so skillfully. At least on the surface. When Users residing in the Hub committed crimes, most of them destroyed evidence with their skills or through their inventory. An ordinary investigator would not be able to catch the suspect in those scenarios.

Therefore, the government devised advanced hypnosis skills to be used by investigative forces and law enforcement. Obtaining confessions from suspects or acquiring crucial evidence with these skills became a public affair.

Of course, strictly speaking, using those skills indiscriminately without being involved in a case was illegal. I, who was not yet being formally investigated, should not undergo such extreme methods, but there was no way Moon Issak would listen to my pleas or logic.

Sure enough, Moon Issak also snorted; he must have arrived at the same conclusion, “Really? Do you want me to thank you for informing me of that?”

However, despite that sarcastic remark, Dawon did not lose his smile, “You should be extremely grateful. You would’ve remained clueless about why you became brain dead until the end.”

“……?”

“Since Hypnosis is also a kind of attack skill, you should’ve fallen for Lee-kyung-ie’s charm by now.”

"……What?" I said. I opened my eyes wide as I looked between Moon Issak and Seo Dawon. Who's fallen for who…?

"I guess you've truly become an undead." Moon Issak mockingly twirled his index finger near his temple. [1] He was openly taunting the Mage.

I also couldn't comprehend the Mage's words; Moon Issak had fallen for me? The things he did to me were something one would never do to someone they liked.

However, regardless of the skepticism on mine and Moon Issak's face, Dawon continued to talk, "Lee-kyung-ie is currently using the title, 'Sweeter than Candy.' While using that title, he can use 'Counter Attack,' which doubles the damage of any attack he suffers."

"……"

"So, you're in love with Lee-kyung-ie twice as much as the hypnotic effect you tried to instill upon him."

My eyes opened wide at such an unbelievable statement.

Then, Moon Issak chuckled, "Aren't you a total lunatic right now…? After indulging in gay tomfoolery, does the whole wide world look like a flower garden to you?"

Dawon-ie smiled with his eyes, "Really? Then why did you put a ring on him?"

"What?"

"You placed the ring your mother gave you on Lee-kyung-ie's hand."

Startled, I looked down at my hands, almost reflexively. Of course the ring wasn't there; I had thrown it away a long time ago.

"……" Furthermore, Moon Issak stood with a vacant expression, as if he had been hit with a hammer. It seemed like he was shocked by his own

bizarre actions, as if he had just realized the absurdity of what he had done.

“Look–even now. When I’m standing next to Lee-kyung-ie like this…”

“……”

“It’s clear that your insides are twisting.” Then, Dawon-ie slowly bowed his head towards me. I closed my eyes in anticipation.

Bang–!

However, before Dawon reached me, something flew our way before colliding into something with a tremendous sound.

When I opened my eyes, I could see that Moon Issak, who had rushed towards us, had lifted his silver-wrapped arms right before our noses. He seemed to be breaking down the shield that Seo Dawon had made. With a fierce expression on his face, he swung down and struck the shield over and over again.

Baam–!

The shield couldn’t withstand the second attack and gradually began to crack. Then, through the crack of the marred shield, his and my eyes met.

Slam–!

The shield had shattered, but Moon Issak stood still. Right there. He couldn’t take his eyes off me.

However, the silence didn’t last long.

“Fucker…!” Suddenly, Moon Issak stumbled back a couple of steps. He held his head with one hand as if his temples were throbbing.

Meanwhile, Dawon smiled as Moon Issak flopped about. “So, why are you being so greedy, even if it won’t work?”

“Shut…Up…!” Moon Issak shouted, but dark red blood began to flow from his nose.

By that time, Moon Issak must have realized his condition had worsened and stepped back even more. He failed to keep his balance and collapsed into an unsightly mess. Perhaps he had suffered a concussion.

Slowly approaching him, one step at a time, Dawon whispered, “It’s a bit eerie to think that everything you had done has been returned, twice as strong, right?”

“……”

Moon Issak hastily created a silvery ring in his hand but soon the light rapidly faded, and he fell down in agony, clutching his heart.

I saw the fallen Moon Issak’s face flush red; the nosebleed showed no signs of stopping. Rather, the speed of the blood flow became faster, as if the blood in his veins were circulating his body quite quickly.

“Hrrnk….Ugh…!” Now, Moon Issak couldn’t even breathe properly and was short of breath.

Dawon told him what he was experiencing in a sickly sweet tone, “There are times, when you’re ‘in love,’ your heart beats incredibly fast and you become short of breath. You’re experiencing exactly that–just twice as extreme.”

“Ha-haagh…C-Cough…”

“Don’t resist it, accept it. If you hold out any longer, your brain will melt. Rather than dying, isn’t it better to ‘devote’ yourself to Lee-kyung-ie and to love him?”

“Ahh… Hnngh…”

“Of course, those feelings won’t be returned.”

Moon Issak twitched as he listened to the Mage. I was shocked to see that his eyes had rolled back until I couldn't even see the black of his pupils.

However, Dawon didn't stop there; he grabbed Moon Issak by the collar and lifted him up. He whispered softly in the investigator's ear, "You have no idea how long I've been waiting for this moment…Ever since I discovered that ring on Lee-kyung-ie's hand."

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: There's a lot to talk about here:

1) I honestly forgot that Lee-kyung had that title.
2) I was indeed wondering why Moon Issak seemed to…love Lee-kyung in his own twisted way. The ring incidence did seem a bit out of character for him.
3) Oh my god, Seo Dawon's last line in this chapter…The chills.

Footnotes

1. Basically, Moon Issak is saying Seo Dawon is insane.

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Chapter 345

Chapter 345

Moon Issak's seizure didn't last long. His breathing became slower and more stable, as if he were falling asleep. The blood flowing from his nose gradually stopped.

Dawon released his collar and flung him away like he was trash. The sight of the man collapsing on the floor was both satisfying and somewhat relieving, as if some of the wounds in my heart were healing.

But the joy of victory didn't last long. I looked at the Mage and realized that the outlines of his body were gradually becoming hazy; I hurriedly reached out to him, "Dawon-ah…!"

The summon time had expired.

I couldn't hide my disconcerted emotions as I held onto Dawon's disappearing hand. However, the weight of his presence gradually faded, and the background of the room began to shine through his body.

Dawon-ie placed his hand on my anxious head. Then, in a sweet but firm voice, he said, "Use Moon Issak to get out of here."

"What?"

"Don't use the other servants. When you leave the mansion, contact Koo Hui-seo and join him."

"What about you? Why… are you going to disappear like this?"

Up until now, the servants remained visible to me even if the summon time had expired; therefore, it felt ominous to see that more than half of Dawon's body had disappeared.

However, Dawon shook his head and reassured me, "It's because this location is a bit… And your condition isn't ideal right now. You'll be able to see me again in a few days."

"Then…"

"Don't be scared, and just use Moon Issak. You can do it."

"……"

"Let's meet again."

"……" I felt strangely insecure as I listened to those words. What if I lost my memories again after I let go of him? Such anxieties swirled around my entire body.

However, when I looked up and saw Dawon's face before it completely disappeared, I felt ashamed for indulging in such weak thoughts. Dawon-ie was looking back at me without a single worried wrinkle; he had faith in me. I nodded slowly, and Dawon smiled.

In the end, I was left in the room with only the unconscious Moon Issak and the out-of-her-mind Da-hee-ssi. Da-hee-ssi leaned over the torso of her doll and continuously mumbled the same words with vacant eyes, "Darling… Jaeho-yah… Won't you wake up?"

"……" I moved slowly so as to not provoke Da-hee-ssi–at least, as much as possible. Her weapon… I knew it had completely burned to ashes, but I didn't know what she would do.

"> Holding my breath, I slowly approached Moon Issak, whose eyes were still closed.

"> "……"

Under my feet, Moon Issak breathed fragilely, as if his breaths would stop at any moment. Of course, I didn't feel sorry at that sight. Not at all– honestly, I just wanted to step on him.

However, I forcibly suppressed that malicious impulse and tapped his side. Then, after just two taps, he opened his eyes.

Moon Issak looked at me before grabbing my ankle with a grip that almost felt as if he would drag me away. I didn't think a chain and manacle would be able to clamp my ankle with a tighter force.

"Choi Lee-kyung?"

"……"

"What's this… Why am I here?" Moon Issak looked at me with a confused expression. It looked as if he'd believe whatever came out of my mouth… His vacant and almost idiotic expression made me feel as if he wasn't truly all there.

I had never seen such a meek and gentle look on his face before, but looking at that made my insides twist. Was that what I looked like when I was hypnotized? I wanted to hit him as he stared at me, but…

"Haah… Moon Issak-ssi." I sighed.

"Huh?"

"First, let's get out of this room." I reached out to Moon Issak, trying not to let my personal feelings bleed into my actions.

He grabbed my hand quickly–as if it were a reflex. As he straightened up and got off the ground, he finally seemed to recognize Da-hee-ssi, who was in the corner of the room, and furrowed his brows. "What the…? What happened…"

I was curious as to what Moon Issak's reaction would be, so I kept an observant eye on him and didn't stop him.

It felt as if his mind was repeating the same thoughts, but he suddenly stumbled and suffered a nosebleed. The hypnosis effect had been triggered; whenever Moon Issak tried to repel various thoughts or doubt certain delusions…whenever he tried to reconstruct his memory… pain seemed to be inflicted on him.

‘I know. Because, I’ve experienced all that.’

In my case, I felt a piercing pain–like a needle stabbing my brain–accompanied by a deep depression; Moon Issak seemed to be suffering direct damage to the brain since he was inflicted with pain twice as strong as mine.

Eventually, Moon Issak couldn’t overcome the pain, stumbled, and leaned against the wall. As I looked at his blurred and dulled expression, I finally understood why Dawon had been relieved. Just leaving him alone like this could turn Moon Issak into an imbecile. Of course, the man had brought it upon himself, but…

“Could you tie Da-hee-ssi up?”

“…Why?”

“I can’t do it myself. My hand is like this, after all.”

“…Ah.”

Looking at him nodding his head gently at my instructions, though the logic barely supported my statements, I was sure that Moon Issak’s cognitive ability had completely deteriorated–plunged into the abyss–today. And that realization dulled a bit of my deep hatred.

Anyway, following my command, Moon Issak took out handcuffs from his inventory and tied up Da-hee-ssi. As soon as she was bound, she lost consciousness and collapsed. I laid her on the bed before quickly rushing to Kim Sangyoon’s room.

“Hhaaghh!”

“S-Sangyoon-ssi!”

“…Yes? Lee-kyung-nim!?!”

And, as soon as I told Moon Issak to awaken Kim Sangyoon, Sangyoon’s eyes fluttered wide open before he looked around with a puzzled expression.

Although his body had been immobilized and his weight had been cut in half while he lay on the bed, his expression, fortunately, didn’t look too bad after he opened his eyes. The reason the Warrior hadn’t been able to regain consciousness until now was because Moon Issak had forcibly put Kim Sangyoon to sleep using a skill.

Although I was angered by Moon Issak’s deception, I was greatly relieved when Sangyoon said he was fine and had not incurred any other injuries.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Lee-kyung-nim?”

“What? Yes… I’m fine.”

“But… your hand?”

“Ah…”

As soon as Sangyoon-ssi returned to his senses, he saw my severely injured left hand and began to worry. He was emaciated and diminished enough for his clothes to be incredibly loose on him, but he was only worried about my hand. Looking at his frown, I felt incredibly emotional.

When I bit my lips without being able to answer, Sangyoon-ssi looked restless, “A-Are you hurt? Are you sure you’re okay?”

“…I’m alright, Sangyoon-ssi… Rather than worrying about that, we have to get out of here quickly…”

“Get out? Where to?” At that time, Moon Issak, who had been silently observing our conversation, suddenly involved himself.

Kim Sangyoon looked at him and then back at me with an uneasy expression. His apprehension seemed to belie thoughts like, ‘What’s wrong with that guy?’

“First, Sangyoon-ssi. Try to stand up.” I said.

“What…? Ah, yes.”

Ignoring Moon Issak’s words, I began to help the Warrior. Kim Sangyoon still seemed a bit worried when I blatantly ignored the investigator, but, when I placed my hand on his shoulder, his startled body hopped in place. “I-I-I!! I can do it.. Stand up.. By myself!”

“Ah… I understand.” I forced myself to lower my hand when I looked at his reddened face. Fortunately, Kim Sangyoon was able to balance himself by gripping the bed frame.

However…

“Where are you going, Choi Lee-kyung…?” Moon Issak blocked my way and asked again. With a nervous expression I had never before seen on his face, he tried to grab my hand.

“Don’t touch me.”

“……”

As soon as he reached out to me, I hit his hand away. Moon Issak shrunk in on himself; his hand flinched back, like a mimosa flower. [1]

Kim Sangyoon nervously flitted his eyes between us as he watched our interaction. I’m sure he was curious, but I merely smiled awkwardly at him; I couldn’t explain when Moon Issak was around.

Looking at my face and then at Moon Issak, Kim Sangyoon muttered something with a perplexed expression, “Is that guy having another seizure… Ah–It’s nothing.” [2]

"……"

I knew who Sangyoon-ssi was referring to, but… I just pretended I didn't hear him. Then, as if trying to cover up his slip of the tongue, Kim Sangyoon quickly changed into clothes from his inventory and walked out of the room.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: I just think this story must be absolutely wild from Kim Sangyoon's point of view. Also, is Lee-kyung still in his bathrobe?

Footnotes

1. A flower that responds to external stimuli. When touched, its petals curl in on itself.
2. I'm unsure about the word, seizure by the way. That is the right 'literal' translation…but it seems off.

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Chapter 346

Chapter 346

“Choi Lee-kyung.”

“……”

“……”

“Choi Lee-kyung, Choi Lee-kyung, Choi Lee-kyung…”

After I ordered him to not touch me, Moon Issak didn’t try to do so anymore.

However, he followed me and Kim Sangyoon persistently and continuously called my name. Though Kim Sangyoon looked a little curious, his stares towards Moon Issak were filled with not only curiosity but wariness as well.

Amidst this strange atmosphere, we exited into the yard where Moon Issak’s car was parked.

I turned towards the investigator–something I hadn’t done on the journey here; he looked at me like an obedient dog. If he had a tail, it would have wagged gently.

“Give me your car keys.” Of course, I only bluntly held out my hand.

Moon Issak obediently took the car keys out of his pocket, but, before he placed it in my hand, he asked, “Where are you going?”

“You don’t have to know.”

“Then, let’s go together.”

“Don’t want to. Just give me the keys.”

“……” He looked at me with a frown. Then, he pulled back the arm that held the car key and grumbled like a child, “Where are you going?”

“……”

“You can’t go where you used to live. Bae Jaemin probably has someone stationed there. You’ll get hurt.”

“It’s none of your business.”

“I don’t want Choi Lee-kyung to get hurt…”

I laughed at his mumbles. How amusing for someone who had tortured me to the point that I couldn’t use my hand properly to say such things.

However, there was a difference between Moon Issak back then and Moon Issak now. Even though everything had reached an unbearable point, I took a deep breath and spoke sincerely to his genuinely concerned face. “Wait here. I’m going to go out for a while before coming back.”

“How long will you take?”

“It won’t take more than a few hours.”

“……”

“I won’t even run into Bae Jaemin.” I shook off his grip. Moon Issak hesitated and looked at Kim Sangyoon with a conflicted expression.

Then, black blood began to drip slowly from his nose: the penalty that was inflicted on him every time he tried to resist hypnosis. Kim Sangyoon flinched at the sight but remained silent.

Moon Issak began to murmur to himself, almost as if he were trying to persuade himself, wiping his blood with tattered sleeves, “Choi Lee-kyung is going to come back. In a few hours, so…”

“……”

“I have to let him… go…”

The car key was hanging on Moon Issak’s trembling fingertips, and the keychain started to warp. Perhaps he had exerted too much force.

Worried that the car key might shatter in his hand, I approached him. Then, I grabbed hold of Moon Issak’s arm.

I looked at his burning red ears with disgust. However, Moon Issak tried to embrace me, ignoring my expression. I knocked his arms out of the way, trying to keep this conversation as short as possible.

“…Wait here. Alright? I’ll be right back.”

“Then, hug me just once…”

“……”

“Cough…” Kim Sangyoon, observing us from behind, released a startled cough. I tried not to pay attention to him.

I quickly dug myself into Moon Issak’s arms as he wanted, but before he could hug me back, I snatched the car key from his weakened hand. Moon Issac looked vacant as he stared at me slip through his grasp.

“Sangyoon-ssi, let’s leave,” I said.

“Yes, yes…”

Meanwhile, I threw the car keys to Sangyoon-ssi. He skillfully caught it and took the driver's seat, while I quickly got into the passenger seat.

I saw Moon Issak take a few belated steps closer, but Kim Sangyoon tactfully stomped on the accelerator. Fortunately, as soon as we stood in front of the parking brake, the door opened automatically. Only then were we able to leave this tiresome mansion.

Kim Sangyoon was tense as he glanced in the rearview mirror. Once we started driving onto the road in front of the mansion, he let out a sigh as if he had been holding back his breath.

"That… What is going on with that madman?" Kim Sangyoon asked.

"…He just hurt his head a little." I couldn't come up with anything to say, so I answered a bit haphazardly. Kim Sangyoon didn't look convinced, but he didn't refute and closed his mouth after a while.

Then, he entered Koo Hui-seo's home address into the GPS. Along the drive, he moved according to the guide's voice while stealing glances at me.

Cautiously, he said, "Excuse me, but… I've been meaning to ask."

"Yes?"

"Your hand… Did Moon Issak perhaps do that?"

"……" I didn't say anything, but that seemed to be answer enough. Kim Sangyoon let out a pretty vulgar swear.

It was then–

"Lee-kyung-ah."

“Arrgh!” I was startled and almost leaped up by the low voice that tickled my ears. If it weren’t for the seatbelt, I might have hit my head on the car ceiling.

However, the person who surprised me didn’t seem to care but instead extended a delicate and beautiful hand from the backseat. Following that hand, I turned around and called out their name, my heart heavy with overwhelming emotions. “Dawon-ah!”

“…D-Did you say Seo Dawon?” At my words, Kim Sangyoon’s face paled. He looked around uneasily, but I didn’t care about the Warrior’s reaction and simply held onto that cold, white hand. Dawon also disregarded Kim Sangoon’s panicked words and stroked my chin.

After caressing my roughened, irritated skin a few times, he clicked his tongue and said, “Just as soon as you gained some weight…”

“Hm?”

“…Let’s eat something tasty later.”

“Ah… Should we?”

“……” Sangyoon-ssi must have been wondering if I was talking to myself, but I ignored him.

‘It’s not a secret to Sangyoon-ssi anymore, anyway…’

I rested my head on the headrest while Dawon-ie stroked my hair slowly. His touch made me feel comfortable–made me feel as if I had come home.

That realization felt strange. Did I feel relieved because the Mage was nearby? Even though I couldn’t return home because of Bae Jaemin and was currently running away in Moon Issak’s car–the one I basically stole from the investigator?

“The other… Servants? What about them?”

“You’ll be able to see them soon.”

“Really…?” I yawned and glanced back. Dawon was expressionless until he met my eyes– then, he smiled. The smile seemed a bit insecure, but, before I could ask him about it, he gently suggested, “Sleep a little.”

“But…”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Ridiculously, I felt tired as soon as I heard that.

I ended up closing my eyes. My last memory inside the car was feeling the cool hand–which would never turn lukewarm–sweeping across my forehead.

* * *

I found myself being held in someone’s arms as they walked down a long corridor. Only the faint sound of footsteps, muffled by the thick carpet, reached my ears.

By then, I was slowly regaining consciousness. When I opened my eyes, a familiar mansion entered into view.

And the person holding me was…

“Huh??”

“Are you awake, Lee-kyung-ssi?”

…was Koo Hui-seo.

I startled at his face, which I hadn’t seen in a long while; Koo Hui-seo watched me flail with wide eyes. I rolled out of his arms and sat at the foot of a sofa. “W-When did I get here… No–What about Sangyoon-ssi? Dawon-ie?”

“Mm… Sangyoon-ssi has been treated in a ward as soon as he arrived at the mansion. Seo Dawon is… Won’t Lee-kyung-ssi know better than I? It’s just the two of us here.”

“Ah… I-Is that so?” After exchanging a few words, I was able to calm down a little bit.

I looked over Koo Hui-seo; his pale skin, skinny body, and large glossy eyes looked the same, but his complexion was somehow worse than before.

As I looked at the sunken skin underneath his eyes, I automatically asked, “Hui-seo-ssi… Are you severely unwell?”

“It hasn’t been long since I’ve recovered.”

“……”

“Still, it’s alright. The doctor said that if I continue to take medicine regularly, I’ll be able to live a few more years.”

“What did you say?”

Not even 10? He just had a few years left? Was he talking about a terminal condition?

Startled, I stared at Koo Hui-seo; he stared back with a complexion that, now that I thought about it, wouldn’t make me surprised if he fell dead the very next minute. I wondered if he was making some absurd joke, but the man wasn’t mentally well enough to engage in such banter.

Eventually, I asked him again, “Excuse me, if you’re talking about a few years…”

“If all goes well… about 3 years?”

“What? Then…!”

“So, that’s why I’m saying… Lee-kyung-ssi… I have a request to make.” Koo Hui-seo, who was still sitting down, reached his frail hand to

me.

Become a Patron!

TL: So… Moon Issak isn’t killed? Will this become a liability or a resource?

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Chapter 347

Chapter 347

I stood up while holding that hand, but I couldn't respond to Koo Hui-seo. It wasn't because I found it hard to believe his words–that he wouldn't live long–but because the hand I just grabbed was so cold that I couldn't believe it belonged to a living person.

"…Is the request Koo Hui-seo-ssi wants to make… Don't tell me–you want me to make you into a servant?" I asked, adopting a deliberate cold look.

Then, Koo Hui-seo tilted his head, "Is that not an option?"

"No–that's not the problem. Is there really no other way for you to recover?"

"Mm… I don't know?"

My heart ached as I looked at his vacant expression.

Perhaps he didn't even think about finding another way to live. This man had been waiting for death his entire life–the doctor's conclusion may have been the happiest thing he had ever heard in his life. He couldn't erase the anticipation and excitement on his face.

That face was just so unbearably pitiful. I knew he had a terrible childhood and had been shunned by all those who were supposed to love him. Furthermore, I was also one of the people that Koo Hui-seo wanted–craved attention from–but couldn't have.

However…

“Were you really… going to ask me to turn you into a servant when you died?” I asked, clenching my teeth.

Koo Hui-seo must have read something in my expression, but he failed to properly grasp my inner emotions. He merely rolled his big eyes around and continued to say, “Yes… But, come to think of it…”

“Yes?”

“Lee-kyung-ssi doesn’t like me very much. I suppose he might dislike that idea.”

“……”

“But still, can’t it be done…? In return, when I die, I’ll leave all my inheritance to you. You’ll be able to live without having to work for the rest of your life…”

“……” After hearing such a stupid statement–was that all his brain could manifest?–my forehead wrinkled.

Koo Hui-seo kept an eye on my changing expressions as he offered unsolicited information on his properties. “Well, I… I have 200 billion in assets that don’t need to be taxed. If you want, I can set up a corporation or trust, and…”

“Shut up. Please.”

“Ye~es…”

I rubbed my brows as I looked at Koo Hui-seo’s guileless expression–it seemed he had no idea that this would anger me.

This man is a fool. A three-year-old child could probably debate better than him. Therefore, I shouldn’t get angry… he wouldn’t understand anyway. He’ll probably just wail, ‘I’m sorry… Should I kill myself now?’

So…

“Koo Hui-seo-ssi, if you die within three years, I definitely won’t sign a contract with you.”

“What?”

I grit my teeth and decided to speak at his eye level. Adopting a deliberately mocking tone, I said, “It’s the truth. Why should I sign a contract with a dreary person like you? I’ll forget about Koo Hui-seo-ssi as soon as he dies.”

“S-So mean…”

“Koo Hui-seo-ssi, you’ve never been abroad, have you? After demolishing that bastard Bae Jaemin, I’m going to travel the world with Dawon-ie. Jealous?”

“……”

“Without you, I think I won’t have any concerns about being with Dawon-ie. Lighthearted and free. It’ll be a relief, really.”

“That’s really, really too much…” Face flushed and tears streaming down his cheeks, Koo Hui-seo protested with a cracked voice. The more I spoke, the more upset he became; he wiped his tears with his drooping sleeves, like a child. “Lee-kyung-ssi is truly cruel… This must be Seo Dawon’s influence…”

“……”

“I wasn’t even going to ask you to summon me… I just didn’t want to… be apart from Lee-kyung-ssi…”

It took great effort to stop myself from shedding tears at Koo Hui-seo’s pitiful pleas. It seemed that he hadn’t noticed my reddened eyes–his vision was impaired from his own tears.

So, hiding my emotions, I said, “…But, if Koo Hui-seo-ssi can live for 30 more years, I’ll sign a contract with you.”

“What?”

“I keep on saying this, stop hurting yourself. We can search for different doctors and also ask for second opinions from Priests as well. They say that ‘healing’ can’t cure diseases, but if what’s wrong with you is caused by a curse, we might be able to cure you with skills or items.”

“……” However, Ko Hui-seo looked even more depressed than before. He seemed like he wanted to protest–his cheeks trembling slightly–but eventually, only tears streamed down his cheeks. My encouragement to live on seemed to hurt him more than anything else.

“Besides, you…your child will be born soon, right?”

“Yes…”

“That child… Excuse me, but it’s going to be a human child, right?”

“…Something similar to that, I suppose?”

I sighed briefly, but, since I needed to persuade him in any way possible, I continued to speak quite seriously, “Koo Hui-seo-ssi needs to take good care of that child. Koo Kyungman… is going to die, right? If you die as well, that child will become an orphan.”

“……”

“Do you not want Koo Kyungman to die? No way–do you perhaps want to die with him?”

“No…” Koo Hui-seo shook his head, and his fingers twitched in my grip. I knew his mind could easily drift elsewhere, but at least the tears had stopped. So, I let him be.

Koo Hui-seo touched my hand several times; his ears flushed red. He hesitated like that a few times, then, in a nearly pleading voice, he asked,

“…Lee-kyung-ssi. You don’t want me to die?”

“Yes.”

“Th… Then… Do you like me?”

“Yes.”

Koo Hui-seo’s eyes doubled in size. “Truly?!” He shouted in a loud, almost screaming voice.

I didn’t think he’d understand, but I sighed and looked at him head on. “I like you enough to not want you to die.”

He turned rigid momentarily. I placed my palm on his chest as I worried that his breathing might have stopped completely.

Then, as soon as I placed my hand on his chest, Koo Hui-seo tightly gripped my hand with tremendous force. The excitement and passion reflected on his face… it was, as I predicted, overwhelming. I took a couple of steps back and unsuccessfully tried to rip my hand away from his grasp. I shook my hand, “Let go of me.”

“Just once… Can you tell me that one more time?”

“No–I won’t tell you again.”

“Ahhh… You’re too much! I… I was going to give up! Why does Lee-kyung-ssi continue to…”

Of course, I had no intention of observing Koo Hui-seo’s abnormal excitement. So, I aimed a kick at his legs straight away.

However, Koo Hui-seo tried to dodge, and my kick landed between his legs. While the man stood perfectly fine, I…

“Are you insane?”

“…**Whine**…”

The hardness between his legs made me feel filthy. Damn it… I thought he was acting a bit unusual ever since his ears turned red…

“Haah… Let go of my hand now. If you don’t let go, I’ll actually hit you.”

“……” Koo Hui-seo made a face that stated he might want to get hit, but, when I shot a scornful glare at him, he reluctantly let go of my hand. I looked at him irritably, but when I noticed sweat trickling down his temple, I closed my mouth.

Koo Hui-seo licked his dripping sweat and smacked his purple lips, “I can’t help it… Since Lee-kyung-ssi keeps on coaxing me to live…”

“Your complexion doesn’t look well. Sit here for now.”

“Will you really make me a servant in thirty years?”

“Yes. I understand, so… Rest for now.” When I calmly cut off his words and commanded him to rest, Koo Hui-seo quickly flopped down on the sofa. Then, he began breathing heavily, face flushed.

Even so, his gaze was constantly on me. After his ‘excitement’ had calmed down, I asked him what had happened during the months I was absent. “What happened while I was gone? Koo Hui-seo-ssi, I heard you were hospitalized.”

At that, Koo Hui-seo seemed to shrink in on himself a little. He answered slowly, “I… Moon Issak brought a search warrant…”

“What?”

“Fortunately, he wasn’t able to find any substantial evidence… Anyway… At first I thought Lee-kyung-ssi told Moon Issak everything. He seemed to know far too much during the investigation…”

I grit my teeth as I listened to Koo Hui-seo. It was astonishing to think that, within just a month, he managed to gather so much information from me and used it for various purposes.

At the same time, I became concerned that Koo Hui-seo might have fallen victim to Moon Issak's "hypnosis." If he went so far as to obtain a search warrant and interrogated him, Moon Issak might have manipulated Koo Hui-seo as well.

"Did Moon Issak do anything weird to you by any chance?"

"Ah… Mmm. Well, that was all taken care of by the 'other Koo Hui-seo'…."

However, my worries vanished with Koo Hui-seo's subsequent words. As I looked at his bright and innocent expression, I thought, 'Even a crazy guy like him has his uses…'. I shook my head–it wasn't good to harbor such disrespectful thoughts.

—

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: For those of you guys that guessed "He wants to become Lee-kyung's servant," ya'll guessed right. Smh, though, I'm glad Lee-kyung is literally telling him to not be a deadbeat dad. I feel like eldritch horror babies won't grow up well if they don't at least have a few positive adult influences…

….though, with that in mind, maybe it's best if Koo Hui-seo doesn't raise that child.

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Chapter 348

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At that time, Koo Hui-seo, reading my countenance, opened his mouth, “So, Moon Issak-ssi seemed to know Lee-kyung-ssi quite well…”

“Yes.”

“I was a little…angry, so I cursed him a little…”

“What?” I asked, a bit flabbergasted. Koo Hui-seo blinked before suddenly opening his mouth. When he stuck out his tongue slightly, a black-bordered magic circle appeared on his previously clean, pink tongue.

Startled, I asked, “What… is that?”

“Mm… the ‘protection’ magic Mother cast on me…? Actually, it’s more akin to a curse… If someone tries to harm me, the curse retaliates, right? This… I learned how to control it a little” Koo Hui-seo reached for a single stem from the flower vase bouquet, as if he were going to show me first-hand the effect he talked about.

[Wither.]

He said something with his unusual, black-dyed tongue; the flower quickly wilted and dried up, as if it was reduced to black charcoal. I was

fascinated by what I had seen. “Wow… That’s amazing.”

Koo Hui-seo lowered his eyes at my sincere admiration while fiddling with the now-crispy flower. Perhaps he was feeling a bit bashful.

Looking at it, I wondered what kind of curse Koo Hui-seo cast upon Moon Issak. I voiced my question out loud.

Koo Hui-seo rolled his eyes around before shyly saying, “Mm… That’s… Well, he pretended to be intimate with Lee-kyung-ssi… Stuff like… If he just voiced his desires, you’ll get married to him soon… And he said that Lee-kyung-ssi was clinging to him willingly…”

“Is he crazy?” I frowned. I was concerned about what bullshit Moon Issak may have spouted.

However, Koo Hui-seo soon smiled and shook his head, “So… I wished that [it wouldn’t come true].”

“What?”

“Ah, I just wished for his desires to ‘become unfulfilled’… Moon Issak-ssi said that Lee-kyung-ssi was in love with him. But, no matter how I thought about it, something seemed off… My curse made it so that whatever he wanted did not come to pass.”

I thought for a moment–did Koo Hui-seo’s powerful curse somehow influence Moon Issak’s deterioration? ‘Judging by the timing, I don’t think those two are totally disconnected…’

If Koo Hui-seo’s curse truly had such a strong effect, I should be careful going forwards. Even if he doesn’t become hostile towards me, I can’t be sure how the interplay of his curses may unfold.

So, I asked him for further details about the curse. “Koo Hui-seo-ssi. That curse… Does it take effect immediately? Or, is there a delay?”

“The time the curse takes depends on the target’s resistance.. Also, the curse’s activation condition is that my blood should touch or smear onto the

target…”

I frowned once more. That meant that Koo Hui-seo’s blood somehow found its way onto Moon Issak. “Did you fight with him?”

“Well… As soon as we were left alone, he suddenly hit me…” Koo Hui-seo said. He resembled a child tattling to an adult. “If it weren’t for the other Hui-seo… It might have been a disaster..”

“Were you hurt a lot?”

“Just a hole in my abdomen? But, I’m okay now.”

“That’s not a small injury!” If his fragmented personality had resurfaced, there was no way that was a minor injury.

Koo Hui-seo only blushed slightly in response to my concerned expression. I sighed deeply when I looked at him. He grinned like a dog wagging its tail whenever it saw its owner.

Just as he opened his mouth to speak–

–“Aaaarghh!”

I suddenly heard Kim Sangyoon’s scream from a near distance. “What’s that? … Sangyoon-ssi?”

“Yes…?”

Startled by the familiar voice, I quickly leapt out of my seat. I reflexively looked towards Koo Hui-seo, but the man wore a puzzled expression. I swiftly opened the door of the sitting room and rushed outside. “Sangyoon-ssi! Where are you?!”

“Ah–Ahhh! AhhrghH!”

Upon hearing Sang-yoon’s screams echoing through the corridor, I could sense that something was seriously wrong. Koo Hui-seo grabbed my hand and led me in the direction of the screams. “This way.”

The room Koo Hui-seo led us to, running, was decorated like a VIP hospital ward. Various medical devices and hospital beds furnished the room, and Kim Sangyoon was screaming on a large hospital bed next to the window. It was as if he had gone hysterical from some great shock.

“Sangyoon-ssi! Are you alright?” I asked.

“…Lee-kyung-nim?” Fortunately, when Kim Sangyoon heard my voice, he returned to his senses and rushed to my side. However, his hands were still trembling.

Kim Sangyoon held my hand tightly with his hand and pointed with his other finger at the curtain-drawn bed opposite to his. “Th-Th-There’s a bizarre monster in there… N-No… A corpse…!”

“What?” I looked where the Warrior pointed, but I could only see a shadow made by a pile of blankets.

However, the ensuing answer came from Koo Hui-seo. “Ah… Did you see Kyungman-ie?”

“Huh?”

“…Ky-Kyungman-ie?” Kim Sangyoon stammered.

“Because this is the only room that has medical devices… Kyungman-ie also uses this room… I forgot to explain in advance.”

Listening to Koo Hui-seo’s casual explanation, I finally realized the identity of the bulky shadow behind the curtain, and I shuddered slightly. It made sense why Kim Sangyoon had screamed like that. That thing wasn’t a proper corpse… The Warrior’s fright was understandable…

However, Kim Sangyoon looked even worse when he heard Koo Hui-seo’s explanation. “Kyungman-ie… No way–are you referring to the missing former Red Dragon Guildmaster?”

“…Yes.”

“Y-You’re saying the person over there is Koo Kyungman? But, the stomach…”

“……” I couldn’t bring myself to explain the situation and kept my mouth shut.

Kim Sang-yoon looked at me and Koo Hui-seo alternately, as if he couldn’t believe those words. Then, he seemed to gaze at me with a hint of reproach when I avoided eye contact. The Warrior took several deep breaths, trying to calm himself.

It was then–

“……” A faint groan could be heard from Koo Kyungman’s bed. As soon as he heard that, Kim Sangyoon rubbed his forearm–goosebumps had risen all over his skin. The Warrior retreated half a step. On the other hand, Koo Hui-seo approached the bed.

As Koo Hui-seo’s footsteps rang out, the slight movement behind the curtain became more pronounced. Perhaps Koo Kyungman had recognized Koo Hui-seo by the sound of his steps alone.

“Mm, are you awake?” Koo Hui-seo crooned.

“……”

Fortunately, Koo Hui-seo didn’t fully draw back the curtains; he walked to the bedside by slightly lifting the curtain. The interior remained hidden. When Koo Hui-seo placed his hand on the ‘inflated’ shadow, the violent movement suddenly ceased. The wriggling tentacles on the ground slowly began to crawl up.

I stared blankly as those tentacles wrapped around the rounded, swollen stomach… When, suddenly, Kim Sangyoon gripped my arm with his clammy hand. I managed to tear my eyes off the bed and look at the Warrior.

Kim Sangyoon whispered, lowering his voice, while sweeping back his cold, sweat-soaked bangs. “Then… Did Koo Hui-seo turn Koo Kyungman into that…thing?”

“……”

“That’s… That’s seriously not something any human being should do. I almost threw up when I opened the curtain. I thought I was pretty immune to creepy and grotesque things, but…”

“……”

“Wouldn’t it be better to kill him? Koo Hui-seo is… Koo Hui-seo is insane. Lee-kyung-nim… I truly don’t think this is right.”

I carefully examined Kim Sang-yoon’s repulsed face. He didn’t take his eyes off the bed across from us, and, with each passing moment, his emotions seemed to shift from disgust to something closer to hostility.

Of course, what he just saw was enough to elicit those feelings. The memory of when Koo Hui-seo had first ruined Koo Kyungman’s body had made me suffer from nightmares for quite a long while. But time had passed since then; I wager that Koo Kyungman probably didn’t even resemble a human being by this point.

But…

“The reason why Koo Hui-seo is cooperating with us is… because we’ve thrown Koo Kyungman into his care,” I said.

“…What?”

“And Koo Kyungman brought about his own death for what he’s done to Seo Dawon and the other Red Lotus guild members. Koo Hui-seo’s life was horrid because of him as well.”

“But…!” Kim Sangyoon grabbed me by the shoulders, slightly frustrated. He probably wanted to maintain a general baseline of decency afforded to all human beings…Well, something like that, I suppose.

However, I couldn’t say anything to console the Warrior. Since…When was it? I had long thought that Bae Jaemin and the remaining HaHae members needed to be dealt with as brutally (or more) as Koo Kyungman.

After sighing, I told him, “Sangyoon-ssi also needs to kill Ahn Joo-sung.”

“That’s…”

Kim Sangyoon’s protest dwindled off. Though he aimed to kill Ahn Joo-sung, he probably had no intention of making him live through torture like that.

‘Sangyoon-ssi is… more compassionate–a better human–than I had thought…’

He used to be a real punk, but there was a line in his heart the Warrior was loath to cross.

And strangely, my heart hurt as I faced Sangyoon-ssi’s dislike. Even though I knew that those feelings were directed towards Koo Hui-seo rather than me, I was a bit sorrowful at his abhorrence.

I used to believe the same thing as Kim Sangyoon–that there were lines a human being should not cross. And, I lived according to my conscience as well. But… People who live like me will get beaten and injured by those more morally corrupt.

I recalled what Koo Kyungman had done to Koo Hui-seo.

I also recalled what Moon Issak tried to do with me.

And, I even recalled that Bae Jaemin’s current revered position in society originally belonged to Seo Dawon. Therefore, I was determined to make my thoughts clear to the Warrior.

—-

Become a Patron!

TL: ahaha… T_T For all ya'll who had forgotten about what had happened to Koo Kyungman… I guess we're getting reminders this arc. Also, ngl ya'll, Kim Sangyoon is slowly shooting up my fave character list. What a good boi. Lee-kyung also shows signs of trauma from what had happened with Moon Issak. He's hardened in reaction to Moon Issak's attempts to overpower and, quite frankly, rape him. As a victim, I think he's blaming himself for not being stronger.

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Chapter 349

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“Sangyoon-ssi. We don’t have to use Koo Hui-seo’s methods, but we shouldn’t back down just because we might commit cruel acts. If necessary, we can make Bae Jaemin suffer Koo Kyungman’s fate. Rather, perhaps we should…”

“……”

“I get it, now. Even Moon Issak, who wasn’t our direct enemy, tried to use me as soon as he saw an opportunity.”

“……”

“So, perhaps the fact that I showed vulnerability was the real problem here…” If necessary, I needed to be cruel and have the power to retaliate. If I had those traits, could Moon Issak have done what he did to me?

Even if Koo Hui-seo were to be criticized by all others for making Koo Kyungman unable to retaliate or resist, at least he was able to protect his position from Koo Kyungman’s grasp.

And I had a lot to protect compared to Koo Hui-seo. Instead of disdainfully dismissing his cruel methods as unethical, I should have seriously considered similar measures. I felt nauseous at my own foolishness.

However, Kim Sangyoon looked as if he wanted to draw a different opinion from my argument, “That’s…”

When he saw the tears in my eyes, he closed his mouth. He quickly became restless and grabbed my shoulders, “By any chance… While I was asleep, did Moon Issak…?”

“……”

He stared at my tightly shut lips, and his face contorted with distress. But, he didn’t ask further questions and slowly released his grip.

With a pained expression, Kim Sangyoon spoke to me as gently as he could, “I understand. I know what you mean. So…”

“……”

“I won’t judge, so you don’t need to persuade me. I was always going to do as Lee-kyung-nim asked, anyway. Also, when I meet that bastard Moon Issak again, I’ll rip him apart. Well…you might not believe me, but…” At the end, Kim Sangyoon trailed off and bit his lips. Perhaps he was thinking about his own limitations. Even if he saw Moon Issak right now, it would be too hard for the Warrior to overpower him.

Even though he sacrificed his life span, he failed to gain a perfect advantage against Bae Jaemin and was pathetically defeated when the Priest used [Divine Descent].

I wanted to alleviate the sense of shame on Kim Sangyoon’s face, but I also coldly judged that I needed to mentally arm him in advance. If this sense of inferiority could spur him to become stronger, then Kim Sangyoon wouldn’t recklessly burn away his life.

So, in the end, I didn’t tell him ‘You’re okay as you are.’ Consolation would only soften the atmosphere; such words held no real power.

Therefore, a deep silence settled between us.

Swish–

“…Are you finished with your conversation?” Koo Hui-seo emerged from behind the curtain with a strangely flushed face. Though he seemed to have overheard our conversation, his countenance remained unchanged.

And, it was Kim Sangyoon–and not me–that responded to those words, “Yes. I… My screams earlier… Anyway, I’m sorry.”

“Ahhh… That’s fine…? Normally, when people see Kyungman-ie for the first time, they pass out. I don’t know how many times I’ve had to change his caretaker…”

“……” Kim Sangyoon nodded without even lifting an eyebrow. And finally, after seeing the determined expression on his face, I was able to release a deep sigh.

Koo Hui-seo closed the bed curtain carefully and approached us. The shadow of his snake-like tentacle tail trailing behind him flowed like my complicated emotions. The complicatedly twisted tentacles–reflecting my heart’s current state–disappeared when I met his eyes. “Koo Hui-seo-ssi.”

“Ye~es?”

“Koo Kyungman… how much longer will it take?”

“About a week?”

“..Then, afterwards… It’s… going to be born?”

“Yes… I think it wants to come out now, actually. Maybe it’s because it has absorbed almost all the nutrients that can be extracted from its mother…”

“……”

“Perhaps it inherited its impatient temperament from its mother…?”

I observed his strange cheer before making a small request, “…That’s great. Could you perhaps get me a stamina recovery potion?”

“Understood.” Koo Hui-seo slowly nodded, opened his inventory, and took out several gilded potions. I handed one of them to Kim Sangyoon. He didn’t refuse, and I drank the potion after he did.

And, as I drank, I thought…

…First, I felt the need to confirm Koo Kyungman’s end with all the servants. Since an unpredictable entity was about to be born from Koo Kyungman’s abdomen, I may need to react or take action with the servants.

Therefore, I needed to urgently restore my stamina until I was well enough to at least summon Seo Dawon.

* * *

“……”

I knew before I opened my eyes… the owner of the cool body temperature. I ignored the goosebumps along my skin and gently woke myself in his cold arms. Then, I embraced Seo Dawon firmly.

“Why…Did you show up so late?” I asked.

“I’m sorry.”

I buried my head in his chest and scolded him, though my words didn’t carry any heat. Seo Dawon just smiled and ruffled my hair.

I sniffed the Mage to my heart’s content as I rubbed my face against his chest. Even though he was merely a soul without a fully formed body, the Mage exuded a unique fragrance…though I don’t fully remember when that

started to be the case. After savoring his bitter and elegant aroma for a time, I slowly lifted my head. “What about the other servants?”

“They’re waiting outside the door.”

“…So, you managed to kick them out, huh?”

“If they had any tact, they should have left on their own.” With that said, Seo Dawon placed the tip of my left ring finger in his mouth. He gave it a small bite; even now, I couldn’t feel much sensation in that finger.

Actually, I tried to treat my left hand in any way I could while recovering my stamina. Because someone of the priest class had intentionally damaged it and then reattached it several times, the injury had some resistance to skills and healing spells, rendering potions and other healing abilities ineffective. In other words, I wouldn’t be able to use my left hand freely from now on.

I had no idea if Seo Dawon was around at the time of my diagnosis. But, it seemed like he already knew, so I didn’t avoid the way his lips groped my hand.

Seo Dawon finally kissed his mark on my left ring finger before lowering his eyes. I stroked the Mage’s forehead with my right hand. Then, I began to talk about something I had on my mind ever since I had received my diagnosis, “I’ve been thinking, Dawon-ah.”

“Yeah.”

“I… was able to endure and hold on for much longer than I expected. Moon Issak was being foolishly greedy, but… Anyway, I managed to protect our scenario, right? Furthermore, he’ll live like a mentally challenged idiot from now on…”

“……”

Sometimes, you needed to pinpoint moments of psychological victory. Despite the painful memories of defeat and humiliation… one could say I’d

come out of this ordeal in a more advantageous position compared to my opponent. Even though one of my hands had become a bit disobedient, I was still better off than Moon Issak, who had lost control of his brain.

However, Seo Dawon remained silent. He closed his eyes and opened them once more, as if he were trying to catch his breath. Then, he calmly said, “Lee-kyung-ah. You weren’t hurt because you were ‘weak.'”

Despite his gentle tone, I couldn’t help but gasp as if I had been stabbed. But Dawon-ie’s words didn’t end there. “You were originally in a position to command us as our summoner, but that doesn’t mean you’re weak and need protection.”

“……”

“Also, you’ve won in the end. You’ve managed to escape on your own without the need for help from your servants. So…”

“……”

“You’ve won again–and we’ve failed to assist you. You probably won’t punish me because you’re so generous, but please… Don’t think poorly of yourself.” Seo Dawon tilted his head towards my wide-open mouth.

After a brief kiss, the Mage rose from his seat before I could hold onto him. I hurriedly followed him, but Dawon-ie had already reached the door. “Wait, I…!”

I rushed to the door, wanting to alleviate some of his guilt, but Dawon-ie didn’t wait and opened it.

Outside the room, darkness engulfed everything; there wasn’t even a hint of light. Yet, within that darkness, several pairs of glowing red eyes were waiting for me.

—

Become a Patron!

TL: T_T Noo Seo Dawon does feel guilty.

Also, Kim Sangyoon wanted to comfort Lee-kyung so badly. I know it’s the trauma, but Lee-kyung! Stop victim-blaming yourself! You did well!

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Chapter 350

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“……”

“……”

“…Everyone… Long time no see.”

There was an awkward silence. As my eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness, I began to distinguish more than the color of their eyes; I could now make out their expressions as well.

I studied their expressions one by one before stopping and flinching at Kim Olim’s face. If the other servants wore blank expressions that hid their suppressed anger, Kim Olim didn’t even bother to hide her fury.

She tried to hold back her anger when she saw my pause, but she scanned my body with her lips drawn in a tight line. Her gaze fixated on my left hand, “…Choi Lee-kyung, show me your hand.”

“I…” I was going to say, ‘It’s alright,’ but Choi Kyung-sik, who was standing behind Kim Olim, looked at me and shook his head. He seemed to be signaling for me to not provoke her. With a short sigh, I reluctantly extended my hand to her.

As soon as Kim Olim held my hand, a warm energy formed and dissipated at each knuckle. Then, Kim Olim recited some skills in a barely audible voice. She didn’t just use one skill–she must have muttered at least 5 different ones in a short moment.

However, with each time–as the short warmth disappeared–there was no change in the scar. Her frown and the wrinkles in her brow deepened. Afterwards, many more attempts all failed. She said, in a hoarse voice, "… When I'm resurrected… I'll use all the Priests in the hub so I can find a way for you to move properly again. There has to be a way."

"It's alright. You don't have to get too serious…"

"……"

"Well, I don't really need to use my hands for this class anyway… Besides, there's no pain now."

"……"

I said all that to relieve her guilt, but Kim Olim's expression became even colder. For the first time, she retorted quite coldly to my words, "Choi Lee-kyung, don't talk like that. Do you still not know why we've always refrained from being parasites and consuming your blood?"

"……"

"Though it's not your fault that you've become injured, don't let yourself become an inevitable sacrifice. There's nothing good about you suffering loss."

Her tone was icy, and her expression remained cold. However, I could feel her true feelings from the way she couldn't take her eyes off the scar on my hand.

Scratching my head with my right hand, I obediently apologized, "I get it. I'm sorry… I'll be more careful from now on, and I'll work hard in physical therapy…"

"……"

As I spoke, Jung Garam suddenly stepped into my arms and embraced me.

I immediately placed my hands on his shoulder, and his cute–as always–face popped up to look at me. Jung Garam stared at me for a long time, which made me a little nervous. However, he soon broke out into a child-like bright smile, “Choi Lee-kyu~ng, I missed you, you know!”

His words eased this heavy atmosphere. I hugged him back with a relieved heart, “I missed you as well. It was so frustrating without you guys… Whew.”

“Right? It must have been hard for you to be deprived of seeing a handsome, charming, young boy like me every day.”

“Haha… Hah.”

While Garam-ie was busy showcasing his cuteness [1] Choi Kyung-sik also sneaked up beside me and checked me over.

His eyes seemed to linger on my still bruised and blotchy neck, but he didn’t look for long. However, he took out another bottle of that horrible tasting potion from his inventory and handed it out to me.

“Nngh…” A frown automatically formed on my face; I couldn’t bring myself to accept the potion.

When he saw me hesitating, Choi Kyung-sik pushed his glasses up on his nose bridge and began to sarcastically say, “How rude of you to look so disgusted at another’s masterpiece.”

“Why does your masterpiece taste so disgusting? It feels like I’m shoving garbage down my throat whenever I drink it.”

“Good medicine is always bitter. If I make it sweet, its potency drops.”

“Tsk…” I had no choice but to accept his reasonable argument.

Just then, Choi Kyung-sik took out another bottle and gave it to me as well. “We’ll need to double your potion requirement. From now on, drink two bottles twice a day.”

“Are you crazy? Never!” I protested and tried to hand the potion back, but Choi Kyung-sik didn’t back down.

“And, after you drink it all, you should undergo some training.”

“Hah?”

“Don’t worry, this body will teach you personally.” Moreover, as soon as their terrifying prescription was given, Woo Ragi made a surprising suggestion while leaning against the wall, a little apart from us.

As I knew his ‘can’t-be-bothered’ nature well, I couldn’t really believe those words–my eyes opened wide.

The corner of his lips twisted when he saw my surprised expression, “From now on, call me ‘Teacher’ and serve me properly.”

“Are you crazy?”

“You’re the one who’s crazy. You’re the one who’s being brainless, acting all weak and saying ‘it’s okay’ even when your hand was smashed.”

“That’s…!” I was about to be furious, but, when I saw the Swordsman’s eyes, my mouth closed automatically.

Woo Ragi didn’t say anything more–perhaps he read something from my slightly startled expression. However, he didn’t take his words back; he must have already resolved to train me.

Cold sweat running down my back, I looked around. I wanted someone to put the brakes on this crazy idea. However, no one disagreed with Woo Ragi. Even Dawon-ie, who I trusted, seemed to sense that I was in trouble but he didn’t step forward.

And…

“Hamster-ssi, Eunji was surprised at your unexpected grit.”

“Huh…?”

“Eunji is speaking about Moon Issak. Because Hamster-ssi didn’t give in, he kept on trying this and that and ended up committing suicide, in a sense.”

“Ahh… I-Is that so?”

“Yes. By the way… Hamster-ssi hasn’t forgotten the promise you made to Eunji, right?” Eunji, who stood there wearing a lovely gray dress, said when she saw Jung Garam and I clinging to each other.

I was surprised to see her reprimanding gaze, but I soon remembered that Eunji liked Garam-ie. I quickly removed myself from his embrace.

Jung Garam looked at me with a dissatisfied expression, “What, Choi Lee-kyung. Why are you pushing me away all of a sudden?”

“Um… M-my back hurts a little…”

“Huh? Really?” Fortunately, my hastily-made excuse stopped Garam from clinging to me any longer. However, it felt like my brain was twisting when I saw that Garam-ie still wasn’t looking at Eunji.

Garam didn’t really seem interested in Eunji even if she was resurrected as a servant. Eunji decided to cooperate with me because I promised to facilitate their relationship. I have to at least make a show of fulfilling her promise, but…

‘…I…With what confidence did I make that promise…?’

Although Dawon and I had gone through some twists and turns to finally confirm our feelings for each other, I still lacked the ability to matchmake others or understand their feelings.

But then, Seo Dawon looked at Eunji and asked, “By the way, why do you call Lee-kyung-ie a hamster?”

“Ah, that’s… because Master Choi Lee-kyung-ssi appeared as a hamster in Eunji’s Vengeful Ghost Memory. He was so small…”

“W-Wait a minute!” I quickly intervened in their conversation and blocked it.

However, Seo Dawon’s face already looked slightly intrigued. I turned around and tried to signal to Eunji that she should shut up.

Eunji looked contemplative for a bit but couldn’t turn a blind eye to my pleading expression. She shouted loudly, “A-Ahem… The ham… I mean Master Choi Lee-kyung-ssi and Eunji are going to keep that a secret between us!”

“T-That’s right! And… Vengeful Ghost Memories doesn’t take place in reality, and it ended successfully anyway. Don’t dig into it!” I stammered.

However, despite Eunji and my consensus, the servant’s expressions only became more mysterious.

Dawon gave me a thorough look and muttered to himself, “Hamster?”

I glared at Dawon, who was lost in thought. I couldn’t trust the mage whenever he adopted that expression.

“……”

“I’m so fucking curious.”

“Why didn’t you appear like that in my Vengeful Ghost memory?”

“What breed? Golden? Roborovski?”

The other servants added their own two cents.

—

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a Patron!

TL: Kim Olim wants a hamster Lee-kyung for herself. So does Seo Dawon, but I don’t trust him with a hamster.

Footnotes

1. the exact word here is , which is ‘acting cute’ but in a very uwu way.

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Chapter 351

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“Hey, hamster. Why don’t you stand up properly?”

“I told you not to call me that!”

The next day, despite my request, the servants all started to call me hamster or Ham-Lee-kyung.

When I looked at Eunji with betrayed eyes, she hesitated before blurting out “Jung Garam-kun said he would keep it to himself…” and trailing off.

I couldn’t really blame the girl who was blinded by love, so I tried to calm myself down.

However, when Choi Kyung-sik handed me a potion and said, with a grin, “I added some sunflower seeds to suit your taste,” or when Woo Ragi sneered and mocked me as I fell during training, I couldn’t possibly restrain my fists.

I forced myself to stand up in order to slap Woo Ragi at least once, but…

Smack–!

I was struck by the cane the Swordsman was holding and collapsed once more.

“I told you not to dawdle when getting up. I told you to stand up as quickly as possible.”

“……”

Even though he watched how I stumbled about, Woo Ragi flourished his hand without any delay. I reached out again, bracing myself against the sharp impact against my backside.

Jung Garam, who was watching us from behind, shouted annoyingly, “Hyung, be a little gentler with your hits. As expected, I should have been the one to teach Ham-Lee-kyung…”

“What did you say, you pervert?”

“Why am I a pervert!”

“Take a look in the mirror.” Woo Ragi was not only mean to me but also to Garam-ie as well. And, at that time, my thoughts matched the Swordsman’s. Whenever Jung Garam stared at me lately, chills ran down my spine.

While Woo Ragi completely dismissed me as he beat me, Garamie would reveal some…sort of sticky, clingy emotion before he hit me… If I had to choose between the two, I’d rather spar with the confrontational Woo Ragi, the lesser of the two evils.

‘If it was going to be like this, I’d rather spar with Seo Dawon…’

I groaned melancholically inside, but it was hard to read Dawon-ie’s expressions when he looked over at my training. It didn’t seem like he was all that happy with letting the other kids handle my instruction, but he didn’t particularly oppose it either.

Was he always trying to prioritize practicality over his own emotions? Anyways, it was embarrassing to roll around on the floor in front of the

Mage. I gritted my teeth and tried my best to dodge Woo Ragi's attacks.

And, like that, 10 minutes had barely passed, when…

"Enough." Kim Olim, whose attention had been on the stopwatch, stopped the spar. However, Woo Ragi finished by hitting me on the chin, and I was sent rolling on the floor.

"Ah, Shi–" I started.

[Clack Clack!!!]

"Hmph."

Lackey protested strongly while observing us, but Woo Ragi only raised his chin arrogantly. I got up from my ungraceful flop and rubbed my tingling chin. I also hastily removed my sweat-soaked protective gear.

"Ham Lee-kyung blocked none of the 300 attack attempts. Of course, he couldn't avoid them either. If it weren't for the armor, your body wouldn't be able to withstand this." Kim Olim cooly evaluated our spar.

I bowed my head and murmured gloomily, "…Honestly, you guys knew that this would be too much for me."

"That's right. We've tried this method before, but I'm afraid we're running out of time to make this method effective." With that said, Kim Olim looked at Seo Dawon. I felt somewhat uneasy as they exchanged glances.

Then, as if she had decided on something serious, she continued firmly, "…So, as Seo Dawon has said, you should actively use your skills."

"What?"

When I didn't understand straight away, Seo Dawon answered me, "Let's use [Possession], Lee-kyung-ah."

“[Possession]?” While I tried to recall what skill that was, I remembered how Seo Dawon fought using my body in the [Owl’s Ghost Ship] dungeon. “So, you mean… You want to spar while I’m using [Possession]?”

Could I use a skill on my teammates?

No one opposed that idea. Woo Ragi looked calm, as if he was forewarned. With my class skill window floating before me, I asked Seo Dawon, “Do I just call on you?”

“No. Mmm… I think it would be better to call Garam-ie, Olim-ie, or even Eunji.”

“I want to do it!” As soon as the Mage finished speaking, Jung Garam raised his hand in the air. No one opposed. I felt a little uneasy, but I was a little curious about what training while using [Possession] would be like. So, I executed the skill.

“**[Possession]**!”

[‘Possession’ skill has been executed…. Please select a servant.]

There were far more symbols in front of me than when I had used this skill before. This was probably because I had succeeded in contracting with more servants than when I was only able to summon Seo Dawon and Lackey.

I looked at the various shining symbols. And, among them, I found one floating above Jung Garam’s name: a blue shark with an open mouth.

[You’ve selected ‘Jung Garam’.]

[Evaluating synergy rate…]

[Currently your synergy rate is 65%! The closer the rate is to 100%, the stronger the skill will be.]

[Would you like to solve the ‘Synchronization Quiz’ to raise the synergy rate?]

I pressed [Yes] and waited a moment.

[1 – What is Jung Garam’s favorite number?

1) 1. 2) 20. 3) 35. 4) 444. 5) 89]

‘How am I supposed to know this?’

The ‘Synchronize Quiz’ was hard to answer this time as well. There was no way that Garam and I would have a conversation like this. Who would ask, ‘What’s your favorite number?’

However, I pressed 1–even if I was wrong, I needed to answer.

[You’ve answered correctly! However, servant ‘Jung Garam’ answered wrong.]

[Current synergy rate: 71%…]

[Starting ‘Possession’.]

“Hah? I got it right?”

“Tsk.. How am I supposed to know about any of that?”

I heard Garam-ie’s grumbling voice, but soon, dizziness hit me. I had to close my eyes. Once I opened them, I was looking down at my body. Lackey approached me and even started to whimper.

And…

“Oh? This feels awesome?” Accompanied by an unfamiliar tone, my body clenched and unclenched my fist with a gleam in my eyes. Although it was my face, the attitude and expression were unmistakably Jung Garam’s.

And Woo Ragi, who had been observing us, didn’t rush in as he did with me. Instead, he gripped the cane like a sword and shouted, “Come at me.”

“Should I loosen up a bit?” Garam-ie, now within my body due to [Possession], snapped his neck and stretched his arms upward. Even though he was simply stretching, the atmosphere felt different from when I was in control. Anyone would easily distinguish between when I and Jung Garam were in control of my body.

And…

Whip–!

Woo Ragi’s cane, which rushed forward immediately, sliced through the air with an audible sound for the first time. Jung Garam, stepping back lightly with his heels raised and ready to bolt, pouted with his tongue peeking out. He smiled mischievously, “Hmm… About two seconds? There’s a delay. Tsk, I wonder if it’s because he’s not used to moving his muscles…”

But even after dodging the attack like that, Garam didn’t stop dissing my body. I was a bit annoyed but eventually kept my mouth shut. The fact that Garam could exhibit such movements with my body, despite the substantial level difference between us, was surprising.

Seo Dawon was also able to move smoothly after entering my body, but Jung Garam’s class required him to utilize his body; the young assassin’s movements felt different. He operated my body like a robot, moving each part separately and meticulously.

Woo Ragi observed us silently before suddenly brandishing the cane in the air. However, the resulting sound was quite unnatural.

“H-Hey. Shouldn’t you put on the protective gear?” I asked.

“Do you think I’d get hit 300 times like you, Ham-Lee-kyung?”

“Scared?”

Garam-ie ignored both my concern and the other’s taunt. Furthermore, Kim Olim announced the start of the ensuing fierce battle with the click of her stopwatch. “Let’s time this again. You’re both forbidden from using skills.”

“Oka~ay.”

“Hurry up. I’m getting bored of waiting.”

As soon as Kim Olims said, “Start,” they faced each other at a speed my eyes couldn’t follow. Garam-ie was not only able to avoid the attacks but also launch counterattacks as well.

I opened my mouth wide as I saw my own fist graze past Woo Ragi’s face. “Th-That’s possible…?”

Kim Olim, who was still watching those two, answered me, “When there’s a considerable gap in ability or level, sometimes it’s more advantageous to switch to an offensive strategy.”

“Then…”

“Currently, Woo Ragi holds an overwhelming advantage. Jung Garam is also outstanding in his own right, but he’s clumsy since he’s not controlling his own body.”

Before her words ended, chillingly, Woo Ragi’s cane changed its trajectory. The end of the cane swung horizontally and nearly touched my throat. If he had reached out any further, I would have been seriously injured, but Jung Garam managed to stop his momentum just in time, narrowly avoiding the hit.

As soon as the young Assassin paused, he frowned, “Ham-Lee-kyung’s body is freaking heavy…”

“Isn’t it more problematic that he doesn’t have any muscles?”

“That doesn’t bother me too much since I was prepared for that in the first place… But there’s too many blindspots in his view, and his lungs feel like they’re about to burst even though I’ve only done this much.”

“How can you feel so weak if your cardiovascular system is healthy?”

“Haah… I really wonder how you’ve gone in and out of dungeons until now with this trash body.”

“…I don’t need to hear that from you two.” When Woo Ragi and Jung Garam just started commenting on my body, I couldn’t endure and I ended up shouting at them.

But, just then, someone gently grabbed my arm from behind.

Become a Patron!

TL: Honestly, without even reading the other options, I pretty much guessed that Jung Garam’s favorite number is 1.

To be honest, I’m not sure how the system decides what the correct answer is. It’s not like the servants and Lee-kyung fill out a personality and taste quiz beforehand.

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Chapter 352

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It was Seo Dawon.

“Huh…?”

Actually, I was only surprised that Dawon had held me from behind; his touch didn’t feel strange at all. Nevertheless, what had surprised me was the warmth permeating from Dawon’s hands… different from his usual chill.

I widened my eyes and held onto his hand. It was completely different from when I summoned him or when I touched his spiritual apparition. It felt as if I were touching a living person.

“Is it warm?” Seo Dawon smiled at my reaction and entrusted his hand to me. I swear I wasn’t the type to create such a fuss over something so trivial, but… But honestly, Dawon’s soft and warm touch felt so nice.

Still, I didn’t want to seem so obvious, worried that I’d incur more teasing; I slowly relaxed my grip, “No… I’m just fascinated.”

“And, because you’re just a soul, your left hand is fine.”

“Huh? That’s right…” I looked up at the Mage. ‘He’s really concerned about my left hand…’

I didn’t want him to feel guilt or other such negative emotions, even though that may be inevitable. So, I sneaked glances at the Mage as he held my hand.

Though I felt excited and happy watching Seo Dawon, I felt strangely anxious as well. Perhaps I'd feel less tense if he reacted angrily, as Olim had.

'Besides… Seo Dawon… It's been a while since I lost trust in him.'

Disregarding the fact that I liked him a lot, he sometimes behaved recklessly or acted behind my back, so I held his hand tightly as I looked him straight in the face, "You know… You shouldn't act willfully–without my permission, right?"

"So suddenly?"

"I was worried you'd go crazy and leave for somewhere because of my left hand."

"Hmmm… Well. Don't tell me, you want to spare Moon Issak's life?"

As soon as Seo Dawon said that, the servants suddenly stopped moving. Even Woo Ragi and Jung Garam, who were in the middle of a spar, stopped and looked at me.

Flustered by the changed atmosphere, I sputtered, "No, it's not that, but… I meant… Don't overdo it. Our goal is, first and foremost, resurrection."

"……"

Even Olim-ie, who would have said her two cents at other times, became expressionless and remained silent. I was incredibly surprised. Honestly, were they focused on killing Moon Issak even if it were to delay their resurrection?

Fortunately, although it was a bit belated, Woo Ragi opened his mouth, "Of course, we can take care of him after resurrection."

Rejoicing, I responded, "Right?! Anyway… Even if you leave him be, he won't be able to lead a normal life from now on."

“I’m not sure how long the counter skill will last though,” Choi Kyung-sik finally chimed in.

I glanced at him before refuting, “Even if Moon Issak recovers, you’ll win that battle after being resurrected. Rather than trying to get rid of him when you’re unstable…”

However, this time, Seo Dawon pulled on my arm gently and said, “To be concerned about Moon Issak to this extent… I don’t think you’re doubting my ability, but I’m a bit angry, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“Uh? Th-That’s not what I meant…”

“I’m just letting him go for now because I can’t think of a satisfactory way to kill him or spare him.” Dawon-ie smiled as he usually did.

I was a little bewildered by that smile. The candid emotions I had seen from him and started to grasp as we became more intimate seemed elusive. What kind of emotions was he hiding behind his calm and composed demeanor? “I…”

“Hmm. It seems as if Ham-Lee-kyung-ssi sees us as disobedient elementary students…”

“What?”

At that time, Eunji, who had been sitting quietly reading a book called [The Princess’s Costume] or something like that, murmured–her pink eyes peeping over the top of the book. Then, completely ignoring my reaction, she gave Seo Dawon an idea. “Guild-master-nim. I am against killing Moon Issak-ssi. Instead, I’d like to cut the tendons on his hands and feet, clean him thoroughly, shave off all his hair, and place a cute wig on his head. Of course, dolls don’t have genitals, so we’ll remove those obscene things; since it’ll be hard to take off his nails, it’d be better to take them all out in advance and suture the skin. Then, touch up all of his unattractive parts, and then keep him like that.”

My mouth fell open when I heard the cruel words she uttered in one single breath.

However, perhaps he was interested, Seo Dawon listened to her with shining eyes.

Empowered by his silent encouragement, Eunji perfectly wrapped up her response, “I especially don’t like those rotten, frozen pollack-like eyes. I have a doll’s eye that I really like; we can replace his with ones that have a pretty color.”

“Oh? That sounds good. But, wouldn’t Eunji find it tiresome to take care of that for a long while?”

“Not at all! Eunji has always wanted a doll like that. However, due to Eunji’s high social status during her lifetime, Eunji had to give up this fantasy.”

My mouth became even wider as I listened to Eunji. Unlike my shocked self, Seo Dawon continued to have a pleasant conversation with this dangerously imaginative girl with Peter-pan syndrome.

“Well, since we’re already dead, it wouldn’t be so bad to take advantage of our situation.”

“Right?! And Eunji currently likes pink eyes. Color lenses are a bit… How should I put it? They feel fake… But right now, Eunji’s eyes are actually pink!”

“It suits you. You’ve always liked pink.”

“Ye~es! As expected, you remembered…!”

My head hurt when I saw her staring at the Mage with floating hearts in her eyes.

I looked at Kim Olim, hoping she’d stop them. Fortunately, she frowned as if she found the content of their conversation strange…

“What do you think about segmenting his joints? If he’s going to become an ornament anyway, then you might as well make everything non-functional. Also, removing only his tendons might create an increased risk of escape. Even if he has Priest skills, it’ll be difficult for him to restore wounds that have already been sutured and healed over…”

She said something even more terrible.

I was shocked that even the trusted Kim Olim was actively involving herself in the [Moon Issak doll-making] project.

“What are you talking about?” I shouted.

Choi Kyungsik ignored my pale expression and lightly commented, “Hmm… In that condition, he wouldn’t be able to last one year. Even with preservatives. However, if we dry it well, it could potentially be sold to a collector as a part of their valuable collection. Let’s try making a long-lasting preservative.”

After listening to Choi Kyung-sik, Jung Garam pouted, dissatisfied, “I’ll buy it. In anycase, there’s a use for him somewhere. Hmm… Like a sparring mannequin.”

“Or how about putting him on the black market? It’d be an extraordinary, once-in-a-lifetime auction. Don’t Users involved in something like this like rare and interesting things?”

“You can’t sell something like that!” I shouted.

However, the servants didn’t respond. Even Woo Ragi didn’t seem to think of the conversation as something wild or strange. So, I glanced at him as my last chance for help.

Woo Ragi read my expression quickly and smiled as if he understood me. “Hey. You know you’ll be hit if you disagree at this point?”

“But…”

“Also, I’ve always hated perverted people like Moon Issak, alright? It might be a little awkward for Eunji to remove dicks, so I’ll cut them off neatly.”

He really thought about his own role in this plan, didn’t he? Only then did I realize that their discussion was simply them notifying me of their plan.

Seo Dawon hugged me and my gaping mouth from behind and whispered into my ear, “Lackey has something to say.”

“What?” Listening to the Mage, I looked down at the skeleton hugging my knee. Its head was lifted high, as if it had been staring at me for quite some time. Its pupils narrowed.

[Clack Clack Clack Clack Clack–!!]

[I want to eat what’s left–!!]

“Eat? What do you mean you want to eat?!” Could Seo Dawon have influenced Lackey in my absence? I lifted the skeleton, held it close, and glared at the Mage.

Then, when I was about to blurt something out–

Knock Knock–

I heard a light knocking sound. The door opened.

“Lee-kyung-ssi…” Koo Hui-seo peered out from behind the door.

—

Become a Patron!

TL: My proofreaders are as bloodthirsty as the servants this episode.

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Chapter 353

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"Hmm…?"

When Koo Hui-seo first entered the room, he completely ignored me and strode towards my body that Garam was possessing. However, when he and Garam-ie made eye contact, the ex-chimera blinked, a bit confused.

Then, Garam suddenly looked at me with a sinister smile before turning back to Koo Hui-seo. "Koo Hui-seo-ssi."

"…Yes?"

"Will you kneel down?"

I realized that Garam-ie was trying to prank the other man and tried to dissuade him; however, that idiotic Koo Hui-seo knelt in front of my body with an astringent expression.

And, Jung Garam kicked him right in his solar plexus. Koo Hui-seo allowed himself to be pushed back without any resistance.

"Pffthahaha!"

"Stop it, Jung Garam!"

"Huh? Lee-kyung-ssi's voice…" Despite the sudden kick, Koo Hui-seo stood up smoothly and looked around with a puzzled expression. He then

squinted his eyes while gazing directly at my location. It felt as if he was trying to discern my form within a hazy fog.

Soon after, Koo Hui-seo opened his eyes wide and approached me with a tearful gaze, “L-Lee-kyung-ssi… Are you dead?”

Jung Garam sneered at him, “Well, aren’t you a total fool?”

“…Please calm down,” I deactivated the [Possession] skill. I closed my eyes at the dizzying sensation that soon followed; when I opened them again, my position had completely changed.

I sighed when I saw Koo Hui-seo’s puzzled face, “I’ve merely used one of my class skills.”

“You startled me…” Koo Hui-seo sniffled.

However, Jung Garam must have found him pathetic. The young Assassin clicked his tongue, “Trying to squeeze out tears that won’t fall… Despicable.”

“By the way, what brings you here?” I asked.

“Sniff… I, that is… I came because I think Kyungman-ie is going to give birth soon.”

“Ah… Already?” I had expected the arrival of the child to some extent, but my body stiffened as the news came earlier than I thought.

On behalf of my rigid self, Dawon stepped forward, “How many hours does he have left?”

“He’s already in pain; the doctor said it’ll all be finished in around eight hours.”

“Your younger brother–Is he still conscious?”

“Barely… As far as I know, he’s been almost completely out of it for the past month…”

At those words, Dawon-ie looked at Choi Kyung-sik immediately.

I followed his gaze and saw the Alchemist's hardened expression; I recalled, just then, that Koo Kyungman had played a personal and major part in Choi Kyung-sik's death. Was he disappointed that we had secured Koo Kyungman long before we summoned him? The alchemist couldn't really do anything to his own murderer.

As expected, Choi Kyung-sik asked, in a cold but dissatisfied tone, "…If we were to touch his body, the delicate balance would shatter, I suppose?"

"I guess Koo Hui-seo Jr, would be the problem."

"I need the child…" Koo Hui-seo said awkwardly. Then, in a gentle (as if he were being compassionate) voice, said "I've prepared a place for you to watch the birth. Mmm… Well, if you want to watch in the operating room, that's possible as well."

"Urgh…" I blanched.

In contrast, Choi Kyung-sik didn't seem to be disturbed. He murmured, "Still, it's a bit regretful. I'm dead because my organs melted away. I wanted him to feel the same pain I felt by using the exact poison he used…" As he spoke, Choi Kyung-sik's eyes suddenly twinkled, and he swiftly raised his arm. He waved it about, as if he were searching for something. Perhaps he was fiddling about in his inventory.

"…I found it."

Soon after, Choi Kyung-sik took out an unlabeled bottle filled with purple liquid. He shook it, mixing the contents and making sure the glistening powder that had settled on the bottom was well emulsified, and smiled. "Koo Hui-seo-ssi. Please guide me to the hospital room."

"…I must repeat–Kyung-man-ie has to stay alive until he gives birth."

"Don't worry. I just want to check on his condition for dosage control."

Koo Hui-seo looked distrustful, but he eventually closed his mouth without saying any more. I watched the two of them leave the room with an uneasy gaze.

* * *

Choi Kyung-sik returned sooner than expected. Koo Hui-seo was also calm–it seemed like not much had happened.

Subsequently, Kim Sangyoon, who had been in another room, appeared in a DAA combat uniform and stood by my side with a tense expression. “Lee-kyung-nim, have you been well?”

“Yes. What about Sangyoon-ssi?”

“I’ve been very well!”

Koo Hui-seo’s mansion had a training room, and Kim Sangyoon spent at least 12 hours a day in there as soon as he had recovered.

According to Koo Hui-seo, if more than 70% of the training room was destroyed, a skill called [Automatic Recovery] would trigger. Even if the Warrior destroyed the room with his skills, the room would soon recover. Kim Sangyoon had confined himself in the training room and repeatedly practiced until the [Automatic Recovery] was activated at least four times per day.

Honestly, I didn’t feel good when I heard about that. I was worried that the Warrior was overdoing things after our conversation the other day.

However, contrary to my concerns, Kim Sangyoon’s face was quite bright today. While there had been moments before when his eyes looked a bit lifeless, his current appearance truly conveyed the fact that he had been a professional judo athlete. Even though his dyed hair was fading and

showing dark roots, he seemed less disheveled than before… Indeed, a person's gaze was important to their overall impression.

With a serious look on his face, as if he had suddenly steeled his resolve, Kim Sangyoon said, "Lee-kyung nim. Excuse me, about Seo Dawon-nim…"

"Yes?"

"He'll come for Koo Kyungman's thing…right?"

"Ahh, yes…" I was a little embarrassed when I realized that Kim Sangyoon still hadn't realized that Seo Dawon was always with me. Even now, Seo Dawon was standing by my side, staring at the Warrior.

'It feels a bit off–I feel like I'm deceiving him, however unintentionally…'

Kim Sangyoon, who couldn't know what I was thinking, looked towards me with an innocent and sincere expression, "Then, by any chance… Could I request a sparring match from Seo Dawon-nim?"

"Ah…" I looked at Dawon-ie with an ambiguous expression. Dawon-ie looked at Kim Sangyoon with chilly eyes; the corners of his mouth crooked upwards. He laughed, "He doesn't even need to ask. I'll shatter Sangyoon-ie's pride anytime."

"I… Think he'll probably agree to it."

"Oh, Thank you!"

Seeing Kim Sang-yoon's delight made me feel a little complicated, but, from what I could see, Seo Dae-won was subtly guiding the Warrior's growth despite his harshness. Of course, the Mage would likely deny it if I voiced those thoughts.

Anyway, that atmosphere didn't last long. Koo Hui-seo received something on his cell phone and soon pressed the power button on the large TV in the room.

The TV clearly displayed the operating room right next door, seemingly capturing Koo Kyungman’s surgery from the ceiling. Fortunately, any graphic details were obscured by the doctors and their green surgical gowns, so it wasn’t as gruesome as I had anticipated.

“Is he going to give birth through a C-section?” Kim Sangyoon asked.

“Ye~es…”

I didn’t particularly want to see the operation, but I focused on the screen without taking my eyes off. The surgery proceeded in a calm and quiet manner…at least, more than I thought it would.

However, not long afterwards…

“Huh?”

“……”

There was no sound coming through the screen, so I couldn’t know the reason, but I noticed that there was a little fuss. The doctors paused, discussed something, and resumed the surgery.

However, there was something strange about Koo Kyungman’s body. Instead of being tranquil in his anesthetized state, Koo Kyungman seemed to be wriggling and moving erratically.

Before long, Koo Kyungman’s eyes flew open.

[Aaaarrghhh–!]

Though I could hear no sound, I could only imagine that his scream must have been piercing. I watched as his mouth formed distinct shapes.

[What is…This…?]

Koo Kyungman, now almost completely out of his mind, opened his bloodshot eyes and tried to move his immobile neck. However, the doctors continued their work even though his consciousness had returned.

He looked between his legs.

And…

[Nooooo, it can’t beeearghh!]

His jaw hinged open as he screamed.

I could only observe to that extent; I finally closed my eyes. However, that didn’t stop me from hearing Choi Kyung-sik’s commentary.

“Childbirth is one of life’s most meaningful moments; it’d be a waste if he were to sleep through it.”

It seemed that Choi Kyung-sik had worked to counteract Koo Kyungman’s anesthesia and wake him.

—

Buy Me a Coffee

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TL: Wow, uh, that’s horrifying. And the manifestation of all my fears for childbirth.

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Chapter 354

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When Koo Kyungman returned to his senses and screamed, Koo Hui-seo entered the operating room. After he appeared, the TV screen turned off. It was a relief that I didn't have to close my eyes for a long while due to that, but…

"……"

Even though I strained my ears, there was only profound silence. There was neither joy nor happiness on the servant's faces even after completing their vengeance.

Kim Sangyoon also seemed calm, but his complexion wasn't good. However, it seemed that he made a firm decision to accept all that happened without making a fuss. The other servants were also lost in thought, quietly standing in place.

And, finally…

"I think it's finished." Accompanying Kim Olim's words, the TV turned on again. A clean, organized operating room was displayed on the screen.

* * *

“According to the doctors, Kyungman-ie won’t make it through today.”

“……”

“If there’s anything you’d like to do, you’d better do it now,” Koo Hui-seo, who returned from the operating room, calmly said with an incomprehensible expression on his face.

I looked closely at Koo Hui-seo–I thought he might feel a bit melancholic or hesitant. No matter how much he hated his brother, the man was bound to feel somewhat complicated after seeing something be born from his brother’s stomach…

“He’s conscious and able to listen. I didn’t show him the child, but he’s aware that he gave birth… But, he kept trying to bite his tongue, so I left a bit in his mouth.” Koo Hui-seo was calm, as if he were explaining about a prey he had caught.

Looking at his cold demeanor, I couldn’t tell if I should be relieved or cautious. Nonetheless, it was clear that Koo Kyungman would suffer until the very end.

Choi Kyung-sik smiled. “I want to watch over him until he passes.”

“I can’t be bothered.”

“Shall we leave? Hmm… Though, if he’s struggling and crying, maybe I want to watch.”

“Jung Garam-kun’s taste is so vulgar…”

“Am I as bad as you?”

“You might as well be insulting yourself.”

“What bullshit.”

Although Bang Eunji and Jung Garam quarreled, it seems that Eunji decided to go kyungman-watch as well. [1] Eunji’s interest leaned more

towards pure “curiosity” rather than hatred or anger, and I found her innocent tone more frightening than anything else.

“Hoo… I think I’ll be fine with not looking.” After listening to Koo Hui-seo, Kim Sangyoon shook his head. He and I shared similar thoughts about this event, so I didn’t want to insist on his participation.

However, most of the other servants seemed like they wanted to appreciate Koo Kyungman’s last moments. I wanted to leave, but I wondered if I should stay with them.

At that moment, Seo Dawon asked Koo Hui-seo, “What about the child?”

The room’s buzzing settled down at that question. Koo Hui-seo’s cheeks flushed red, and his eyes shone, “So cute…”

“……”

“Does Lee-kyung-ssi also want to see?”

Looking at Koo Hui-seo’s excited expression, I asked bluntly, “…I’m sorry to ask, but… Is it a real child?”

“Of course! They’re incredibly small…”

“……”

I looked at the Mage briefly before deciding that it would be better to see this ‘child’ rather than Koo Kyungman.

Perhaps he had read my thoughts, Dawon nodded without objecting.

“Show me. I have something I need to check as well.” I said.

“Great…”

Therefore, Seo Dawon, Kim Sangyoon, and I moved to another place– the room that was supposed to hold the baby.

Kim Sangyoon couldn’t hear the Mage’s voice, but he perceived that Seo Dawon was nearby through Koo Hui-seo’s attitude. However, he didn’t tremble or show any signs of fear. He merely continued to look around near me, examining the innocent, empty air with a suspicious expression.

Seo Dawon looked at Kim Sangyoon and clicked his tongue. “It seems like he can’t hide his anxiety.”

“Excuse me, Sangyoon-ssi… Seo Dawon is at my left right now.”

“Hnnghrk! Yes!” His unseemly restless attitude improved a little after I informed him of the Mage’s exact location.

Koo Hui-seo strode forward to the baby’s room without hesitation or responding to the disturbance behind him. He opened the door at the end of the hallway.

“……”

Surprisingly, the servants who attended and served meals to Chairwoman Shin when she was still alive were gathered in the room. They saw us entering, but they moved like ghosts, reacting very little to our presence. They divided, creating a path between us and the crib.

I briefly questioned whether it was alright for a newborn baby to be in such an ordinary room without any medical equipment, but honestly, I didn’t expect this child to be normal either. So, I dismissed my doubts and followed Koo Hui-seo.

And, at last, I laid eyes on the tiny baby, no bigger than a fist, sleeping peacefully on its bed.

“Cute, right?” As soon as I peered into the bed, Koo Hui-seo asked in a proud voice.

“……” I was shocked to see that the baby’s body, below the neck, was covered with intertwined tentacles, like an egg. Only the face was that of a

human child–the body was all covered. Could we really call this a human being?

However, when Koo Hui-seo brought his finger near, the tentacles unraveled, revealing the delicate and slender body of the baby nestled inside, reminiscent of an unwrapped gift box.

Only then did I realize that it looked like a replica of Koo Hui-seo. Looking at the child's reddened skin and thin frame, I felt that it looked more pitiable more than cute. Like its father, the child was adept at making me feel sympathy.

However, Koo Hui-seo simply lightly rubbed the baby's belly with his delighted thumb. The baby's chest swelled up as it took a forceful breath, and then it exhaled heavily; the baby repeated this cycle so intensely that it seemed like something might be wrong.

I couldn't bear to touch the child when it felt like it would crumble at the lightest touch. So, I cautiously said, "…Congratulations."

Koo Hui-seo smiled large enough to show his teeth–a rare sight–and turned to me, "What should we name them?"

I was greatly flustered by his question. The ex-chimera spoke as if he had no doubt that I would name his child.

Setting aside my immediate repulsion of his baby, I had never successfully named anything. Even now, I sighed when I looked over to see Lackey hanging onto the crib, peering inside. Why did I name my skeleton like that…

"…W-Well. To be honest, I'm not confident in my naming abilities…"

I tried to politely refuse, but Koo Hui-seo started to openly pester me, "I would like it if Lee-kyung-ssi named them… Or, can I take one character from Lee-kyung-ssi's name?"

“Sure, let’s discuss this before Kyungman-ie dies.” Of course, there was no way that Seo Dawon would stand by and let this slide. The mage threatened Koo Hui-seo, stabbing him in the chest with his finger, “Why do you want to attach my Lee-kyung-ie’s name to your and Koo Kyungman’s child? Hm?”

“Because Lee-kyung-ssi’s name is pretty…”

“If Lee-kyung-ie and I have a child, I’ll have to use that name. Stop being so clingy.”

“What…?” I opened my eyes wide at Seo Dawon’s last words. No way…did Seo Dawon also become interested in having a child after seeing Koo Hui-seo’s bizarre method of childbirth?

Dawon-ie stopped talking, as if he were a bit embarrassed, when he saw my shocked face. “Lee-kyung-ah, do you really think I would ever make you do something like this?

“No, right?… Still, I was startled…”

“It’s just that…he was so obviously trying to attach your name to this unrelated child…”

Koo Hui-seo rolled his eyes and pretended that he was unable to hear our conversation.

However, just then—

“You look so strangely cute…” Though the disgust did not fully vanish from his face, Kim Sangyoon reached into the crib as if he saw something fascinating.

The tentacles that had been docile when Koo Hui-seo touched them suddenly lashed out and wrapped themselves around Kim Sangyoon’s fingers.

Cr-r-r-r-ack–!

“Arghh!”

In an instant, I heard bones crack. Astonished, I pulled Kim Sangyoon back. The Warrior turned pale and gasped.

Koo Hui-seo was not surprised in the slightest and simply turned towards the bed. Eyebrows gathered and lips pouting, he affectionately scolded the baby, “Baby~… That’s dirty. Gross. You can’t eat that.”

—-

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TL: Seo Dawon, bruh, are you suddenly desiring MPreg? I don’t buy the excuse you gave Lee-kyung-ie. I know you probably won’t want to kill

your lover, but it def sounds like you want a child with him.

Lee-kyung, hit some sense into that man haha.

Footnotes

1. So, is to observe (koo-kyung). Ofc, it’s the first two characters of Koo Kyungman’s name. This is a pun.

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Chapter 355

Chapter 355

“I-Is he completely insane?!” Cold sweat running down his back, Kim Sangyoon took a potion out of his inventory and drank it.

Fortunately, the potion’s effect made his bones stick back together quite quickly, and the pain soon disappeared. However, Kim Sangyoon’s frown and furrowed brows were still directed at the crib.

The most chilling part of this incident, though, was that when the newborn baby heard Koo Hui-seo’s voice, he opened his eyes and stared at us.

The baby lifted his pitch-black eyes, gazed at Koo Hui-seo, and then chewed his lips. Without looking back, Koo Hui-seo reached out his hand.

Then, the servants, who had been standing back as if they were intangible spirits, approached silently and extended a dark red potion-like substance in a bottle. The bottle’s cap was shaped like a pacifier–a nipple.

Koo Hui-seo shook the bottle well and placed it by the child’s mouth.

Suck Suck

The baby began to drink with fervor, as if he were drinking milk. While eating, he gently wriggled both hands and tentacles.

As he fed the child skillfully–so that the liquid would not spill–he said, “The doctor told me to feed him one bottle an hour for a few days. We

should be able to notice a speedy growth, then."

After hearing that, Seo Dawon said, "He'll grow as fast as a big green onion, then."

"Big green onion…" I decided not to dwell further on what drink Koo Hui-seo was feeding his child.

As the child drank, it blatantly stared at Koo Hui-seo–though I couldn't tell whether or not he was focusing on the drink or his father. I was a little puzzled as to whether or not the baby saw Koo Hui-seo as a paternal figure, but it certainly seemed that he felt something special for Koo Hui-seo.

'I suppose that could be a good thing for Hui-seo-ssi…?'

Since he had been shunned or treated like a tool for all his life, it was definitely a cause for celebration for him to finally have a family member on his side. So, I silently observed the two–serene at a surface glance.

"The tentacles seem to be moving instinctively… Koo Hui-seo, does he show any aggression towards you?" Seo Dawon asked.

"Ahh… No. When he attacked me earlier, I pounced on one of the tentacles and crumpled it up. Since then, he's avoided my touch…"

"What???" Koo Hui-seo's calm answer made my head hurt.

Honestly–even if he attacked, how could he inflict pain on a newborn baby?! Only then did I notice that one of the intertwined tentacles, amidst its fluttering brothers, was rigid and scrunched in on itself.

Perhaps the aggressive reaction was instinctual, but I also wondered if the tentacles had reacted so violently to the Warrior because of Koo Hui-seo's harsh punishment.

I felt complicated when I saw the baby's blinking, dark eyes: Koo Hui-seo was truly an unstable caregiver. "Shouldn't you treat it? That's…That is to say, if the tentacle is part of the child's body, an injury this young could give him a hard time later in life."

“I usually recover automatically, even if I suffer injury…”

“Still…”

“Mmm, I understand.” Koo Hui-seo read my expression and gently placed the child on his hand. He then began to pour another potion on top of the tentacles that were stuck to the child’s back.

The baby’s face twisted as if he was about to cry, and when Koo Hui-seo touched the taut tentacle, the baby’s mouth opened. Simultaneously, the tentacles that were stretching and sticking to his body started coiling tightly around Koo Hui-seo’s wrist.

“Ah–hurts…” Koo Hui-seo frowned at the strong grip tightening around his wrist, but he continued to pour the potion over the damaged tentacle.

The tentacle seemed to have loosened and lost some of its rigidity after being doused; it soon began to wriggle. Furthermore, the tentacles wrapped around Koo Hui-seo’s wrist drooped down once more.

The baby’s expression also changed. Nothing dramatically shifted–like the emergence of a smile, but he seemed more comfortable than before. Perhaps…because the pain had disappeared. Above all, he looked so cute with his wide open lips as he stared at Koo Hui-seo.

[Clack Clack!]

[I want to see too!!]

Surprisingly, even Lackey seemed curious about the baby, shaking Koo Hui-seo’s pants while standing by his feet. (Normally, Lackey wouldn’t cling to anyone other than me.)

Anxious, I tried to stop the skeleton, but Koo Hui-seo readily leaned down and presented the baby at Lackey’s eye-level. The baby’s eyes shook when it saw the strange-looking skeleton, but Lackey didn’t seem to care and placed its bony hand on the baby.

[Clack Clack…]

[So small…]

Lackey was also petite as it didn’t exceed 120 cm in height. However, it must have seemed so strange to see a baby much smaller than the skeleton. Lackey’s eyes glistened.

Furthermore, the baby didn’t cry or try to push Lackey away; instead, he used his tentacles to feel around Lackey’s face.

“Ara…?”

The tentacles didn’t stop at groping around the skull’s surface; they even slithered through the empty eye sockets. The tentacles made smacking noises as they tried to smack the hard bone.

It seemed this baby showed great interest in the skeleton. And, unlike with Kim Sangyoon, the baby remained calm, even when Lackey reached out and lifted his body.

“Huh? He’s smiling…” Kim Sangyoon muttered. Following his words, I looked at the baby’s face.

He was indeed smiling. My eyes opened wide, and I was taken aback by the delighted expression on the baby’s face as he opened his mouth wide. Somehow, he seemed quite pleased with Lackey’s appearance.

In addition, the baby wriggled more than when Koo Hui-seo held him; he attached himself to Lackey. Seeing that, for the first time this whole while, I thought, ‘adorable.’

[Clack Clack Clack Clack…]

[It’s so small…]

Though Lackey didn’t seem to dislike holding the baby, it kept shaking its head; perhaps, it found the tentacles wandering through its skull quite ticklish.

The baby was completely fascinated with the skeleton, even letting the liquid he was drinking dribble down his lips.

“At this rate, Lackey’s skull is going to be completely filled with tentacles…” Seo Dawon also looked down, fascinated at their entangled bodies. And, soon afterwards, he flicked a finger to summon something around the baby’s body.

The golden aura lightly brushed against the baby’s body; the baby’s gaze followed the light towards the Mage. His neck muscles were so strong–I couldn’t believe that only a few hours had passed since he was born.

“There’s no skill or curse on the child. Surprisingly, he’s 80 percent human.”

“…Really?”

“Mm, I guess he’s closer to a chimera…Or perhaps, should I say he’s more successful than a chimera.” Koo Hui-seo replied, adding to Seo Dawon’s diagnosis.

“More than that, how did you create an artificial uterus?” Seo Dawon asked.

“I didn’t create it–our guild used Koo Kyungman as a secret project in conjunction with a medical foundation.”

“What about the side-effects?”

“Quite grave. If it wasn’t Kyungman-ie, the operation wouldn’t have been able to proceed. It cost an astronomical amount as well…”

The project required not only advanced medical technology, but also rare skills and reagents as well.

Koo Hui-seo sighed deeply, lowering his eyes, “I was greedy for a second child, but… Kyungman-ie’s body is too weak.”

“……” I didn’t want to hear any more, but Seo Dawon, as if he was strangely interested, continued to pry more details from the ex-chimera. I glanced at the mage.

‘I’m sure I’m mistaken, but if he’s thinking about some nonsense, he’d better quit now.’

With that thought in mind, I subtly pinched the Mage’s elbow. Then, Seo Dawon glanced down at me and smiled. I felt a little uneasy at that smile… and even uneasier at the way he kept looking at the child.

The baby looked so adorable for someone born as a result of brutal revenge. He said he was 80% human, right? Then, if he grew up safe and sound…when he found out how he was born… wouldn’t he be shocked?

Click–

However, those thoughts didn’t last long. The door had opened and the servants crowded in.

No one said anything, but, judging from their persistent smiles, their Koo Kyungman observation must have gone well. Nonetheless, after noticing the baby nestled against Lackey, the servants wisely refrained from making any comments about Koo Kyungman.

“So small…”

“How can he already move around so much?”

“Hehe… He’s climbing all over Lackey-kun.”

“It looks so fascinating.”

Then, Jung Garam was the first to touch the baby. The baby did crook his tentacle, but he didn’t attack and instead squeezed Jung Garam’s hands gently before gathering all over Lackey again.

At that time, Lackey seemed to be getting a bit exhausted by the baby, but it still didn’t pull off the tentacles that had been over its body.

Eunji also gently stroked the baby’s cheek with her hand, but the baby merely blinked calmly. Olim-ie folded her arms across her chest and just gazed at the baby, but, from the look in her eyes, she definitely wanted to touch as well. As for Choi Kyung-sik, he observed the tentacles’ movements with great interest–his eyes fixated on the black tendrils.

—

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TL: I guess baby fever touched the Red Lotus members O.O

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Chapter 356

Chapter 356

“I guess he’ll grow faster than a normal baby,” Choi Kyung-sik said as he observed the baby’s body.

Koo Hui-seo nodded his affirmation, “Apparently he’ll be able to walk in about a month…”

“How fast…”

“And, after a month, the child should start growing at a rate similar to that of other babies. Even I would find it troublesome if he were to become an adult within five years…”

It felt extraordinary enough for a child to be able to walk around within a month. Nevertheless, considering that after this initial explosive growth, the baby would then grow normally, it meant that the many obstacles that would be present while Koo Hui-seo prepared to introduce his ‘son’ and successor would disappear.

I asked Koo Hui-seo, “How’s the atmosphere within the guild? Do you still need to keep an eye on Koo Kyungman’s faction?”

“No. They knew it was a losing battle…”

I was a little reassured. I let out a sigh of relief, “Nevertheless, you needed a successor.”

“Ye~es. Well… I haven’t been feeling well lately, so…”

It wasn’t just the matter of Koo Kyungman. Koo Hui-seo was rumored to have many health problems and was often absent; many guild officials must have wanted to gauge his intentions.

Fortunately, [Red Dragon]’s guildmaster succession had been a mess since the previous generation, so, even if Koo Hui-seo’s baby was seen as illegitimate, there still wouldn’t be much confusion and chaos.

Koo Kyungman and Koo Hui-seo were half brothers. So, they’d be able to stay silent about Koo Hui-seo’s son’s biological mother, even if the father was still officially single.

And strangely, those thoughts brought me relief. I looked at the baby that was innocently frolicking with Lackey. ‘As expected, he’d be better off being in the dark about Koo Kyungman for the rest of his life…’

Looking at it now, there didn’t seem to be any issue, and Koo Hui-seo seemed to like the baby. Moreover, I might be able to influence Koo Hui-seo. In that case, perhaps the baby could grow up normally?

So, I cautiously said to Koo Hui-seo, “Then, I think you’d better keep quiet about the child’s biological mother. That is to say… Even when he grows up.”

“Mmm… Is that so?”

“…Yes.”

Koo Hui-seo didn’t seem to understand, but he nodded without contradicting me. I silently watched his nod, feeling uneasy yet hoping sincerely that Koo Hui-seo would develop a good relationship with the baby.

And, that night, Koo Kyungman breathed his last.

I waited quietly outside the operating room for his end. His corpse–which was nearly unrecognizable as ‘human,’–was placed in a very small

box. The box was moved to the backyard and placed in the center of the golden magic circle Seo Dawon had created.

Whoosh–!

As soon as the box was placed down and we stepped back, blue flames sprouted from the circle and consumed the box. My eyes could hardly open against its force, and the immense heat stung my skin.

The box disappeared in an instant; Koo Kyungman's corpse, within, couldn't be seen. I could barely make out some vague form, but now I could observe everything in a detached manner.

The servants were silent, arms folded over their chests. Among them, Kim Olim held up the Hub's [Holy Scriptures] and recited a short verse as she gazed at the flames.

After her recitation, a few white lights circled around my body before disappearing. It seemed like her words were intended to prevent any adverse effects on me rather than lamenting Koo Kyungman's passing.

After the corpse was burned to ashes, without leaving behind a single trace, Seo Dawon collected powdered bones in a small container. "Where should I scatter these? There are no pigpens within the hub."

"How about inside a dungeon?"

"What about mixing it inside a potion I'll make later? Hmm. But, maybe that'll be a little disgusting to drink…"

"I absolutely object to that."

They only reacted coldly and objectively to his death.

I had hoped that Koo Hui-seo would show some kind of reaction so that I could offer him a choice, but his gaze was fixed solely on the baby nestled in his embrace. He seemed oblivious to the ongoing discussion.

So, for now, Seo Dawon kept Koo Kyungman's bone powder.

* * *

"Bae Jaemin is moving."

Afterwards, two weeks passed.

We stayed in Koo Hui-seo's house; the servants and I mainly used the training room in the mansion to study various defense formations.

In particular, I devised a way to [Possession] skill freely and changed my training style. In particular, Jung Garam pushed my body almost to its limits, so I felt less and less muscle pain when I released the [Possession] skill.

In addition, I trained [Possession] with the other servants, in rotation, so that they can all handle this ability.

As I did so, I got to know small 'TMIs' about the servants–all because of the synchronization quiz. And, as our synchronization rate increased, the servants could exert more control over my body–beyond its normal limits. So, they often questioned me about my superficial preferences, such as what colors I liked or what flavors I preferred.

However, Seo Dawon maintained the highest synchronization rate with me–over 90%. We generally correctly answered the synchronization quizzes even though we didn't particularly share any trivial conversations.

In addition, Kim Sangyoon also showed tremendous growth.

As Kim had said before, the Warrior was a talented User. Even when not using his skill that consumed his lifespan, he demonstrated incredible movement and ability that could stall Seo Dawon for over 15 minutes.

And, he'd become quite skilled when sparring with Jung Garam in close combat. Kim Sangyoon, who had initially struggled to keep up with Jung Garam's anomalous attacks, was now able to follow the young Assassin's movements and launch counter-attacks of his own.

"I told him to prepare the reagent I had mentioned in Choi Kyung-sik's room…"

"Thank you, Hui-seo-ssi."

Koo Hui-seo, as befitting a guildmaster for a guild that dealt with dirty money, was also able to obtain funds through his experience in money laundering. Thanks to this, Choi Kyung-sik was able to build his golem. The golem was as powerful and high-quality as the one the Alchemist had before death.

In addition, Choi Kyung-sik, through biological engineering, created various chimeras for combat and auxiliary purposes.

One of the chimeras, named [Human-skin Face], looked like a very thin, mushy cloth, but, when placed on a User's face, it changed the User's features.

It kind of felt like a mask, but I screamed the first time I wore the cloth and looked into a mirror. Nothing felt awkward or uncomfortable, and yet I turned into a completely different person.

Choi Kyung-sik explained his reasons for creating this [Human-skin Face]. "As long as Bae Jaemin is alive, our exposed identities are a weakness. Though Guildmaster-nim can use polymorph on you at all times, if you enter a building with [Anti-magic] or if you are exposed to similar items or skills, you'll be immediately detected. Furthermore, items that change your face are rare, and they often cause a lot of discomfort. That's why we created chimeras using monster skin. It would be nice if you could

think of that as new crafting materials. You can pre-select the facial features you want to change into, and, when you use it, the chimera smoothly overlays those features on your face without causing discomfort. Unlike any items, the face won't 'float' or pop out when your expression changes, so it's very natural."

Indeed, it was just as Choi Kyung-sik said.

The mask wouldn't respond to anti-magic skills because I was simply wearing a chimera on my face. In other words, even if Bae Jaemin was right in front of me, he wouldn't be able to recognize me.

However, there was a limit to this [Human-skin Face]; because it was weak to water, my original face would be revealed if I washed my face. Extremely humid conditions would also put me in danger.

For example, I had to be careful when it rains; my face would wrinkle. But, still, this mask was well worth using, so I took [Human-skin Face] without any hesitation.

While everyone was prepping… Kim Olim began to tell me about Bae Jaemin's movements.

–

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Become a member!

TL: See, the ability to make “human-skin chimeras” etc would be what makes me want to be an Alchemist in this world. Like, how cool is that???

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Chapter 357

Chapter 357

“First, Bae Jaemin has yet to report us to law enforcement. It seems he still believes that Moon Issak is on our side.”

“Ah…”

“And, Choi Lee-kyung, he tried to threaten your family’s safety, but…”

“What?!” I jumped up, agitated, at those words. Although I had suffered through a lot of danger, I couldn’t hide my distress after hearing that the Priest had tried to hold my family captive.

Kim Olim looked at me patiently, as if she understood my feelings, and continued, “Moon Issak seemed to have secretly hired security. I believe that, since he had you in his grasp, he didn’t want Bae Jaemin to exploit you.”

“……”

“And, because of that, Moon Issak and Bae Jaemin’s relationship has completely fallen apart. As soon as the Priest found out the Moon Issak was backing you, he completely pulled back on his plans to kidnap your family. That is to say…”

“……”

“You haven’t officially become a criminal yet.”

Actually, I was worried that Bae Jaemin might have reported me or prepared a trap while I was on the run.

It's ironic, but the time I spent helplessly captured in Moon Issak's grasp was useful in curtailing Bae Jaemin's actions.

Bae Jaemin couldn't even report me to the investigative agency because he was conscious of Moon Issac, conscious of the man who was in charge of most violent-crime cases. Maybe that was why he confronted me in person.

Kim Olim's words did not end there, "However, it would be dangerous to use Moon Issak as a shield now. There are rumors circulating that Moon Issak has recently taken a leave of absence and is isolating himself at home. This is probably because he has yet to recover from our conflict."

"……"

"If Moon Issak fails to eventually recover, Bae Jaemin could kill Moon Issak or accuse us of murder to the agency to inhibit our movements. He could try and lay a hand on your family again."

"Then… As expected, we have no choice but to go on the offense."

"That's right."

With that said, a holographic map, created by Jung Garam, unfolded on the table we were gathered around. The map was an elaborate floor plan of Bae Jaemin's supposed Hub residence.

Then, when Seo Dawon flicked his finger, a graphic of a round, dome-shaped barrier appeared, surrounding the mansion. "If Bae Jaemin uses [Declaration of Sanctuary] during battle, the range of the skill will be about this size. It'll practically cover the entire mansion."

I would be at an absolute disadvantage–I wouldn't be able to call out my servants again.

Seo Dawon continued in a relaxed tone, “But, the Gods of Order are picky and demanding; they wouldn’t want to step into disheveled, messy places.”

“What?”

“[Declaration of Sanctuary] is a sort of supernatural, covenant skill in which the caster makes a ‘request’ of a higher being and borrows their power. In other words, if the contracted ‘higher being’ refuses, the sanctuary cannot be declared.”

“Then…”

“In some of the Hub’s dungeons, for example, the ‘corrupted’ or ‘polluted’ dungeons within the Tower, the Gods of Order can’t intervene.” Kim Olim explained. Then, the corners of her mouth lifted as she touched Bae Jaemin’s mansion, and she stated, “So, we’ll contaminate his mansion in advance. We’ll turn his mansion into a dungeon, like the dungeons in the [Tower of Command].”

I opened my eyes wide at her words.

Come to think of it, the Hub’s dungeons could be advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on one’s class. Just like Kim Sang-yoon explained on a YouTube livestream a while back, depending on the attributes of each class, certain dungeons favored the Holy attribute, while others favored the Evil attribute. There were even dungeons that restricted skills based on the class.

That was the case with the [Tower of Command] as well.

Many Holy Users were dissatisfied as some of their most powerful skills, such as [Declaration of Sanctuary], were restricted. On the other hand, Evil attribute Users had no skill restrictions and even received reduced damage from monsters, making it easier for them to raid compared to Holy attribute Users.

On the other hand, [Second Company] was incredibly friendly to Holy Users. Not only did they have access to [Declaration of Sanctuary], but most of the items dropped in this dungeon were tailored for them as well.

For that reason, strategy guides often recommended or guided Users to target different Dungeons according to their classes and their attributes. The Servants got their idea from this concept.

However…

“But, is it possible for us to create a dungeon?”

The idea of a User creating a dungeon seemed absolutely crazy. However, Seo Dawon wasn’t flustered by my suspicion and said, “If it has all the necessary components of a dungeon, then it may be recognized as one.”

“What are these components?” I asked, recalling what a dungeon’s inside looked like… Various things came to mind, such as a boss monster or the labyrinthian corridors.

Seo Dawon gave me an answer I didn’t expect, “The most important thing is a reward. Users wouldn’t risk their lives to fight monsters for no reason.”

“Then…”

“So, we’ll send an invitation to Bae Jaemin.” Dawon-ie took a small card out of his belongings and handed it to me. I quickly read the received card.

[If you want Ryu Hyerin back, don’t tell anyone and tear this card up.]

I looked up; Seo Dawon smiled and spoke before I could open my mouth, “It doesn’t say we’ll return her alive.”

"But…"

"Moreover, Bae Jaemin won't expect Ryu Hyerin to be alive. He might not tear up the invitation either."

"Then, we'll have failed?"

"However, he'll have no choice but to tear it apart." The Mage whispered confidently, "The second most important component of a dungeon is this: you cannot exit a dungeon until you clear it."

* * *

Strange rumors began circulating on the internet.

It was about a missing celebrity: Ryu Hyerin. The rumor claimed that Bae Jaemin had kidnapped Ryu Hyerin and was hiding her somewhere in his mansion.

Of course, no one believed that rumor at first. Especially since, after Ryu Hyerin had disappeared, her parents continued to support Bae Jaemin through their interview.

Throughout the interview, it seemed as if they were trying to protect the Priest from suspicious gazes, rather than worrying about their missing daughter. Most folks simply thought, 'Bae Jaemin must have been super nice to Ryu Hyerin's family,' or 'Bae Jaemin has no motive. The two were slated to be married soon, so there's no reason to suddenly kidnap or kill her.'

Then, public opinion was stirred up by a certain article posted on the anonymous forum section on [Ranking Gods].

<About R H R's Parents>

Author: Private

Did you know that they're suing the insurance company now?

They shed tears in an interview, saying that their daughter is still alive…and now they're suing for her death insurance payout.

Originally, if a User can't be contacted for a few days after their disappearance, he or she may be treated as KIA; so, they're trying to cash in on her insurance on presumption of death.

However, advance payment is only possible if there's some sort of proof that the User has gone missing in a dungeon…

I don't know why they're claiming their daughter is alive in interviews if they're going to ask for immediate payment through a lawsuit afterwards…

If they get paid, the insurance premium is about 20 billion won alone. [1]

Also, apparently they're selling or disposing of all of r h r's possessions; they're also already using all the properties in r h r's name.

[Like] [Dislike]

Likes: 234,222

Dislikes: 71

[Comments] (Expand)

FightingDaddy: Is that real?

└**Fighting Daddy:** Wow, fuck, it’s true (Link to Article)

└**Tora:** Is famous User A, R H R?

└**Tetetera:** Who else would be famously missing A-ssi? You r e t a r d.

└**Tora:** Why are you cursing :'(

└**ZeroPointFive:** Wow… these fuckers, stealing all their daughter’s properties when she’s gone missing.

And, soon, anonymous comments followed.

Anonymous: Those bastard parents of R H R were always messed up… They didn’t have a good relationship with their daughter; they’ve been selling her out for a quick buck ever since she was a minor. R H R was the breadwinner of her family… She even gave an interview saying that she had a hard time mentally since she had to plunge into dungeons ever since she was young…

└But now she was Opera’s deputy guildmaster

└Sure, she’s opera’s deputy guildmaster now–does that justify her going inside dungeons when young, exploding monsters, and treating the injured? Don’t bother leaving comments if you’re lacking intelligence.

└When are they getting paid?

└Come to think of it, I haven’t seen any pictures with her family ever since she became an adult *shiver shiver*

└Oh my god

└R H R's mom went to my church. She used her daughter's name, borrowed money, and hasn't paid it back

└Crazy…

Anonymous: Typical scumbags that leech off their daughter's success.

└Wow, I feel sorry for Ryu Hyerin TT_TT

└Ah fuck… I'm also the eldest daughter, but, as soon as I became a User, mine also borrowed 100 million won each… I used to run two dungeons a week to pay it back, and now I'm finally done… I got fucking PTSD from that.

└I paid back all my sister's study abroad expenses… Because of that, my right ring finger flew away. After my sister got married, her nephew called me a cripple. So, I cut ties with her whole family…

└Crazy

___

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a member!

Tl: The return of the internet forum comments T_T It takes me a while to localize them… especially when sentences are abbreviated.

You know, the ability to ‘create dungeons’ brings a sort of meta-conversation into what dungeons are…what systems are. If a User can make a dungeon, that means that dungeons don’t come pre-determined from a system. If I’m thinking of computer science, then this whole ‘dungeon’ matter can’t be a discrete state machine–that there’s no predetermined order of dungeons that was decided when the system was made. (I hope I’m using discrete state the right way haha)

Footnotes

1. around 17 million dollars?

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Chapter 358

Chapter 358

In fact, since the perception that Users earned a lot of money in Dungeons spread around, financial conflicts between some Users and their families became a common issue for discussion in ‘Ranking Gods.’

[My family took control of managing my money, but, to my surprise, the money was gone when I came back later]. This story was now too common to shock others. ‘Ranking Gods’ frequent ‘most popular’ or ‘best’ posts included ‘Never leave money or financial management to your family.’

The tragedy of being swindled by family members with money earned at the risk of losing one’s life or permanent disabilities occurred often enough to be something most Users feared. This was why many Users paid attention to this post, though it was of dubious authenticity.

Furthermore, Ryu Hyerin had the image of being born with a gold spoon in her mouth; she looked as if she was held precious–that she knew no hardships. Therefore, public sympathy for her was inevitable.

People began to speculate that Ryu Hyerin must have had some family-related trauma–that she lived in unknown misery compared to her public image–and began to dig up evidence, one by one, to support such opinions.

<Ryu Hyerin’s interview from when she was 20 years old>

Author: Anonymous

In the middle of the MOU November Special Interview with Ryu Hyerin.

Q: There are rumors that you're a workaholic. You've never spent more than two days off until last year at Opera?

A: Yes, that's true. Whenever unexpected situations arose, I would receive calls even on my days off. In fact, even during my early and middle school years, I worked without taking holidays, which led to me missing school. My grades were terrible at the time (laughs). Later, catching up on the curriculum I had fallen behind on was challenging. As a result, working like this became familiar to me…You could say I'm an involuntary workaholic (laughs).

(Omit)

Q: It's well known that you joined Opera's training program, separating from your parents at a young age. Could you tell us more about this fateful encounter that helped you blossom your talent?

A: My parents caught onto my talent very quickly. They actively looked into various programs and entrusted me into Opera's care. However, I was so young at the time; I couldn't understand why I had to live away from my parents and under such strange and strict rules. I cried a lot at that time… and lived in fear. I don't blame my parents anymore, but, when I was young, I wanted to give up on this talent. Of course, I don't feel that way anymore.

(Omit)

F u c k, just reading this interview is shocking enough

1. The Opera Guild, which forced minors to work at least 6 days a week
2. The terrible fucking training program… It's often covered in public, so many of you guys know about it. When a User awakens and they're a minor, a legal representative signs what's essentially a long-term slave contract, and the minor must live away from their family. They muck about in the dungeons while their parents take all the money… It was notoriously called the modern version of child trafficking. Nowadays, this sort of thing is abolished due to child abuse.
3. And for her to habitually work like that… so she interviewed as if everything was alright and normal… R H R [1] … How must you have felt inside…

I never thought that R H R would live a life harder than no-name streamers [2] … I thought she was the most enviable and richest woman in this country T_T

[Like] [Dislike]
Likes: 56,711
Dislike: 30

Comments (Expand)

Anonymous: Their parents lived in XX district for a long time, but now they live in Cheongdam… [3] So, they've flexed and spent the money they received from R H R… Even her civilian younger sister always travels

abroad and posts luxury brand items on Instagram. But, they use sarcastic hashtags when mentioning R H R…

└ It seems that R H R was distancing herself from her family as she got older, so maybe they were worried about their money spring drying up

└They're devils. Devils…

These articles spread haphazardly; rumors sprung forth from the discovered and posted interviews. Thus, these rumors became 'truths' amongst the Users.

In the absence of any response from Ryu Hyerin, all the attention shifted to her family. As a result, her family's doxxed social media accounts received thousands of hate comments.

In particular, Ryu Hyerin's younger sister's account was heavily bombed. That sister, flustered, answered defensively; it was, perhaps, the worst move she could make: posting sarcastic comments about the judgemental crowd.

The younger sister screenshotted the insults she received via DMs, attached them to a post, and left a brief message:

[Stop writing novels and just sleep at dawn, why don't you, lol

Talking about billions of wons given to us or insurance money etc lol

It's already been over three years since Unni threatened my family and told us to stop contacting her

Even when she was young, she would call every morning, waking us all up and whine lol are we not supposed to sleep either?

I was also never able to go to the Amusement Park with my parents during my childhood either lol every weekend we had to go see my sister lol

Am I also not a victim??

Did I also not miss out on my parent's love??

#Ryu Hyerin #RyuHyerinMIA #Opera #Growupifyouhavenothingbettertodo #Fuckoffandstopbeingsointerestedinotherpeople'sbusiness] [4]

That statement simply added fuel to the fire.

Every day, news about Ryu Hyerin and her family poured out, and some articles even mentioned their family business's tax evasion.

Their house's front yard hosted swarms of reporters, and the family even asked the police to protect them from the harassment. Later on, Ryu Hyerin's younger sister posted a belated apology, but public opinion of her had already reached rock bottom.

Meanwhile, it was no wonder that the interview Ryu Hyerin's family hurried to conduct, thanking Bae Jaemin, caught the User's attention.

<The relationship between Bae Jaemin and the family that cut R H R off three years ago>

Author: Anonymous

Isn't it weird how they're embracing him?

Am I the only one that finds it weird?

If I write this, that guy's fans will swarm here and start cussing me out, right?

But that interview…

'Bae Jaemin is also incredibly saddened'

'We thank him for his full cooperation and his efforts to find her at a detriment to himself.'

'He hasn't been able to sleep, and we are worried for his health.'

Why are they making such remarks in an interview about their feelings? Even Ryu Hyerin's sibling used the hashtag #Awasteofagoodman when Bae Jaemin and Ryu Hyerin's relationship was reported, although they deleted it later…

(Photo)

[Like] [Dislike]
Likes: 557
Dislikes: 6

Comments (Expand)

Anonymous: No way, did she covet her sister's boyfriend o.o;;

└Fucking scary

└Is this a *makjang* drama or what? [5]

Anonymous: Honestly, that's as if they gave an interview with Bae Jaemin… What kind of family wouldn't suspect and instead passionately protect the last person the missing person contacted before she disappeared? Especially if they could hardly be arsed to visit the real victim, R H R, every weekend…

└Doesn't it just give you goosebumps? What's the relationship between her family and Mr. Bae?

└Don't go spreading groundless rumors

└lolol how scary. What if I go 'missing' too lolol

└Is the guy upstairs a fan? Why is Bae Jaemin-ssi always involved in the disappearance or death of those close to him? Why is Bae Jaemin-ssi always involved in the disappearance or death of those close to him? Why is Bae Jaemin-ssi always involved in the disappearance or death of those close to him? Why is Bae Jaemin-ssi always involved in the disappearance or death of those close to him?

└Goosebumps

└Damn, it's a ghost story

└Is that all she has to say about her sister o.o;;

The rumors continued to grow like that, adding kernels of truth into their mass as they became larger and larger.

Moreover, because Bae Jaemin had maintained a very clean and positive image until now, people seemed to derive a certain sordid amusement from

digging into Bae Jaemin's life as much as they had fun while examining the relationship between Ryu Hyerin and her family.

Even minor slip-ups and gaffes by Bae Jaemin, which would have been considered meaningless or easily overlooked in the past, now began circulating in online communities. Furthermore, some of Bae Jaemin's most extreme fans in his fan-cafe added to the controversy with their unseemly behavior (posting comments like, 'if she was going to die, she should have just died alone. Why is she dragging him down with her, grabbing his hair, hmph). As a consequence, the suspicion that 'Bae Jaemin killed Ryu Hyerin' grew beyond control.

In less than a month, the serious blow to his once-pristine image had given us a precious gift: time. Bae Jaemin eventually withdrew from all public activities and seemed to be waiting quietly in his mansion, hoping for the situation to calm down.

And, as I watched all this go down, I couldn't help but wonder if we dealt a significant blow to Ryu Hyerin and Bae Jaemin. The image she had worked so hard to hide had been revealed; the luxurious aura she tried to cultivate was replaced by the image of a struggling, pitiful girl.

If Ryu Hyerin were still alive, she would tremble, teeth clattering, at the thought of her past being exposed. She may have been afraid of receiving pity as much as she was afraid of dying.

And, Bae Jaemin was now being misunderstood as the murderer of someone he had loved enough to lose all rational thought. How must it feel to see the reputation he had built up collapse with just a few lines of text?

Become a member!

TL: Honestly, I was wondering how they were going to resolve Ryu Hyerin's image + death. It's almost poetic–she is a pitiable person, but she would have hated to receive that pity.

Also, this is another sign that I belong in a cushy normal world rather than Dungeon novel world D:

Our society is dystopic…but theirs even more so.

Footnotes

1. Of course, this is Ryu Hyerin (her initials)
2. (Hakko's) The name for Broadcast Jockeys on AfreecaTV with low subscriber counts
3. A wealthy neighborhood in Gangam (of the famous Gangnam style)
4. As a tweet, this is written and translated with purposeful/deliberate bad grammar and punctuation
5. A drama that is difficult to understand or accept based on common sense and moral standards of an average person. These dramas will often feature things such as forced situations/settings, tangled relationships, affairs, and birth secrets. The fewer characters with a "normal" moral compass, the more makjang a drama is. This is Korea's version of melodrama… except with more murder, despair, and tragedy.

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Chapter 359

Chapter 359

Of course, those who suspected Bae Jaemin and those who still believed in Bae Jaemin's image were still deadlocked in a tight race, but the situation took a turn for the worse for the Priest faster than we had anticipated.

That was because Ryu Hyerin's family continued to engage in a PR battle to shake off the public's violent interest in them and their affairs.

[(Summary) We were contacted by HaHae's Legal team and informed in advance of what needed to be said during the interview. We were just reading what's on the script, and we weren't allowed to say anything unfavorable about Bae Jaemin-ssi…]

It turns out that the doubts casted on Ryu Hyerin's supposed death interview were validated.

Thus, the situation began to deteriorate again; people gradually began to think that Bae Jaemin was 'somewhat suspicious.'

Meanwhile, various Users who weren't on good terms with Bae Jaemin began to reveal themselves and expose various suspicions they had about the Priest.

In reality, among the high-ranking users, there were many who wanted to bring Bae Jaemin down due to the fierce competition in the Ranking world. The kind image of Bae Jaemin that the public had known until now was merely a facade the Priest had meticulously crafted for the camera. Therefore, some users who knew his true self decided that now was the time to reveal the truth, one by one.

On top of that, there were now allegations that pointed towards the deeds that Bae Jaemin did to hide his great evil of exterminating [Red Lotus]. For example, the dummy corporation he established to launder money. Bae Jaemin's image had fallen irreparably into the abyss as it was revealed that he had influenced and perhaps crafted documents pertaining to the [Red Lotus] incident.

User Society became agitated; the opinion that the [Red Lotus] incident should be investigated again began to rise.

Although [HaHae]'s legal team belatedly issued a press release to the media and released documents that protested their innocence in the face of the relentless legal and moral assault, public opinion remained cold.

So, as Bae Jaemin was struggling and in a hurry to respond, we started our approach.

Kim Olim gave a short briefing before we started our [Dungeon Making] project. "The person who was in charge of guarding the mansion was replaced by [HaHae] guild members after Park Hoseok's death. All outsourcing was cut. So, it will be hard to find a gap and squeeze in."

"Then…"

"However, the supplies used by the mansion and the security team are still outsourced. We're going to use that to hide Lackey in this box and use the box to enter the mansion's warehouse. They don't inspect the items that are stored separately in the warehouse."

We planned to replace some of the boxed consumables slated to enter Bae Jaemin's mansion and from his 'logistics warehouse.'

It was easy enough to enter the logistics warehouse that was near the gate. Wearing the [Human-skin Face], I was able to move confidently. During the warehouse staff's break time, we managed to access the boxed consumables intended for Bae Jaemin's mansion and the delivery vehicles.

[Clack Clack Clack Clack…]

[I don't want to be separated from master…]

Although Lackey quietly entered the box, it seemed reluctant. To be honest, I was a little anxious as well, but Lackey was the safest and most efficient choice to infiltrate the mansion.

Feeling a bit sorry, I patted its head; only then did Lackey stop biting its fingers in a dissatisfied tantrum and lay calmly, like a doll, in the small box.

A new necklace, made by the combined efforts of Choi Kyung-sik and Seo Dawon, dangled around Lackey's neck.

The necklace's pendant featured a large, green sapphire; the item was laid with an anti-vision skill just in case someone opened the box.

There must be an artifact within Bae Jaemin's mansion that monitored this sort of skill, but what we wanted from Lackey wasn't exactly a stealthy infiltration.

We knew nothing about the Priest's mansion other than the floor plan at the time of construction; even then, the inner structure may have changed if the interior was newly renovated. Moreover, it took too much effort to even enter the mansion. That was too large a venture to leave to the skeleton.

However, as with most mansions, security personnel only patrolled the grounds outside a few times…or there may be a CCTV installed. That's why we planned to send Lackey to an external warehouse and, from there, contaminate the grounds around the mansion in a large circle.

As Lackey lay quietly in the box, the skeleton carried a [contaminating/polluting reagent] made from Koo Hui-seo’s blood in its thin hands.

We knew that Bae Jaemin’s luxurious mansion had a pond and a water canal leading to it, so we planned to release this reagent in that water.

While it didn’t directly affect living creatures, this reagent would play a crucial role when we triggered the [Dungeon] later. It would serve as a potent counter in hindering the [Declaration of Sanctuary].

“Just hide well for a day, alright?” I whispered.

[Clack Clack!]

[Yes!]

As I closed the box, my gaze was fixed on its red glow. I wasn’t too worried as Lackey became a lot more reliable than when we first started.

Soon, we heard the employees returning, and I discreetly exited the logistics warehouse. Seo Da-won placed a light lock on the box, and the securely sealed box was soon buried among other boxes, going unnoticed.

* * *

That evening:

We waited near the logistics warehouse until we confirmed that the delivery vehicle carrying Lackey had begun to move and then slowly

started chasing after the vehicle while maintaining a predetermined distance with a van we had secured before the operation began.

“There’s no change in reaction or plans–they’ll be at the warehouse soon.” Jung Garam displayed a map populated with blue dots and showed it to everyone. According to that map, Lackey had safely arrived at the external warehouse connected with Bae Jaemin’s mansion.

And, under the deserted, remote cover of dawn:

Lackey quietly opened his box, left the warehouse, and hid in the garden to avoid the patrol’s eyes. The skeleton was able to easily avoid detection because I was able to relay instructions to Lackey after seeing the movements of a couple red dots–representing the guards–on Jung Garam’s map.

Following my instructions, Lackey moved agilely, avoiding any possible encounters, and approached the small lake. Then, taking out the reagent, the skeleton carefully poured it into the water.

[Distilled cursed blood is polluting the land.]

[The current progress rate is 2%… Perhaps more blood is needed.]

However, the problem was that there wasn’t enough blood in the [Contaminated Reagent] to contaminate the mansion’s vast garden.

Lackey, having completed its task, had safely retreated, but we were concerned about the vastly lower level of contamination than we had expected.

“Can’t we just throw the whole Koo Hui-seo in?” Jung Garam said jokingly, but his expression was rigid.

We agonized over how to solve this dilemma.

Though Bae Jaemin bought us time by being so elusive, the 2% rate meant that 50 reagents and opportunities to pour those reagents were needed to complete our task.

Moreover, Koo Hui-seo's [Contaminated Blood] wasn't something we could just willfully extract. That man was suffering from an illness. Though he was currently being treated, he wasn't healthy enough to donate large amounts of blood.

"What else can we contaminate?"

"Mmm… Can I give you my honest opinion?" Choi Kyung-sik, hesitating a little, opened his mouth. The Mage nodded.

"Ryu Hyerin-ssi's body. We still have it, right?"

"And?"

"After we clean the corpse thoroughly, we can grind some mana stones and place them inside alongside plenty of ingredients for the curse reagent. And then–"

"……"

"If you plunge it deep into the pond, the contamination rate should rise sharply…" Choi Kyung-sik stared at me as he spoke. He looked as if he wanted my decision.

However, Woo Ragi was the one to respond, "In that case, why don't you just pick up any corpse at a hospital morgue and drop it in?"

"We already have this one–that's why I offered this opinion."

"Isn't it better to have more corpses?"

"The pond isn't too deep, so it would be overkill to put in several bodies."

My head shook from side to side as I watched their war of words. Then, I said, “For now, Ryu Hyerin’s corpse… let’s try to preserve it as best we can. We may have a need for it later, and our attempts to preserve the corpse may become complicated if we process it any further.”

“Hmmm…”

“Anyway, we know we’ll need a larger contaminated specimen or another dead body, so we’ll have to find another way.”

Jung Garam, after listening to me quietly, peered at me while trying to gauge my expression. He raised his right hand slightly and said, “About… Park Hoseok… I took a few parts as a souvenir? Should I give them to you?”

“….Well.” Troubled and flustered, I momentarily forgot how to speak.

Choi Kyung-sik spoke instead, “What parts?”

“Eyeballs and heart.”

“Hmm, they are the most symbolic pieces… Give them to me for now. I think we can soak them in the reagents. If we get another corpse, we can add the pieces to the overall package.”

“Haah… I care about them, but it can’t be helped.”

I wanted to ask why on earth he had been holding onto those parts all this time, but in the end, I gave up on asking. At this point, I didn’t think I would be particularly surprised even if Garam-ie told me he had a person stored in our inventory.

At that moment, Eunji made a pensive expression and asked Choi Kyung-sik, “Does the corpse have to be a human corpse?”

“That would increase the contamination rate the most. A human body is more valuable in the art of cursing than a dead animal.”

“To raise the contamination with an animal corpse, you’d need to dig the pond at least twice as deep. It has to be completely filled to have any effect,” Seo Dawon quickly added, as if he had also contemplated using animals.

As I listened to their conversation, I pulled on Dawon-ie’s arm slightly and asked, “Then what… What do you need to increase the contamination the most? Does it just need to be human?”

“The curse we’re trying to implement is called [Reproduction of Nightmares], which aims to create the best environment for the dead. Like the [Tower of Command].”

“Then…”

“So, I believe a corpse of a high-level User with attributes that opposes evil, like a holy-attribute User, might have a significant impact on the contamination level.”

Upon hearing that, Ryu Hye-rin’s corpse seemed to perfectly fit the bill. However, since we already wanted Ryu Hye-rin as part of the dungeon’s “reward,” we needed another offering to place in the pond.

A high-level holy-attribute User who deserved to be sacrificed…

“…What about Moon Isak?” As soon as I blurted those words out, I felt as if I misspoke.

However, Seo Dawon replied with a gentle smile, as if he were waiting for those words, “I was thinking the same thing, Lee-kyung-ah.”

—

Become a member!

TL: Omg I’m proud of you Lee-kyung-ah. You thought of Moon Issak first! That would be, ngl, such a fitting revenge.
If everyone else has their own revenge targets, Lee-kyung-ie should have his own as well.

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Chapter 360

Chapter 360

First, we moved to Koo Hui-seo’s mansion to find a solution. We gathered in a room not unlike a reception hall and brought up the topic that we were unable to finish earlier.

However, the problem was that Moon Issak’s whereabouts were currently unknown.

We had assumed the investigator was on leave and keeping a low profile at the mansion, but when Koo Hui-seo secretly sent guild members at my request, Moon Issak had already concealed his presence. Moreover, judging from the mansion’s condition, he had been absent for an extended period.

As soon as we heard that, Seo Dawon looked at Bang Eunji. Without even hesitating–and without any verbal instructions–Bang Eunji opened her mouth, “[Chaser].”

The whites disappeared from Eunji’s eyes, and her entire eye was dyed black. And, as if she weren’t fully present in our location, she looked around. However, even after using the skill, she ominously didn’t talk for a long while.

Eventually, after an hour, she said a bit angrily, “If Moon Issak isn’t dead, then he’s with someone who can defend against tracking skills.”

It seems she was a bit furious at not being able to locate her target.

Upon hearing that, the servants soon adopted grim expressions.

“Did he recover?”

“Who helped him? Since he took a paid leave of absence, it can’t be anyone from the association…”

“……”

Kim Olim and Choi Kyung-sik muttered to themselves; soon, the servants all looked at me. As soon as they did, I could guess at their unspoken words.

Dawon covered his mouth with one hand and looked down; before long, he noted, “…He must be searching for Lee-kyung-ie.”

I too had vaguely guessed that, but the mere thought that he still hadn’t given up on me made my jaw tense. Who knew that Moon Issak would be able to roam around, intact and fine…

‘I was too kind to him at the end.’

I should have ordered him to kill himself.

As I regretted my actions, Woo Ragi clicked his tongue, “That bastard, he must know that we’ve been revived somewhat.” His tone conveyed his annoyance.

Kim Olim also didn’t look too happy as she was concerned about the same thing, “Considering how he sought help from some collaborators and escaped… he must definitely be keeping that fact in mind.”

“If he can avoid [Chaser], then it’s virtually impossible to track him until he shows himself first, right?”

Not only did our carefully laid plan fall into disarray at that moment, but we now have another thing to pay attention to–to guard our backs–while in the midst of attacking Bae Jaemin.

Just then, Seo Dawon raised his head. He looked straight at me and said, “Moon Issak’s goal is Lee-kyung-ie. He may be wandering around Koo

Hui-seo's mansion right now."

I flinched and my shoulders shook at his words–but that wasn't because I was afraid of Moon Issak. However, Dawon-ie seemed to interpret my gestures slightly differently, he hesitated to continue speaking, pursing his lips in deep thought.

I clenched my fists and looked at the Servants. They all pretended to look indifferent, but I could sense that they were paying close attention to me. "Well, maybe I should… go outside the mansion. Moon Issak might appear, then."

"……"

This wasn't the safest method, but we didn't have many choices left with our limited time.

Kim Olim observed a short silence before shaking her head, "Don't overdo it. First, let's try to gather some more manpower through Koo Hui-seo…"

"You know we don't have time for that." For the first time, I cut her off and spoke forcefully.

Kim Olim shut her mouth, but didn't seem to accept my opinion. The same was true of the other servants. "…Of course Moon Issak's goal is Choi Lee-kyung-ssi, but wouldn't it be too dangerous to just leave the mansion when we don't have any idea what sort of state or condition Moon Issak is in?"

I stared at Choi Kyung-sik before turning to look at Garam-ie.

Garam-ie was obediently sitting on the floor, cross-legged. His eyes, raised aloofly like a cat, were fixed firmly on my hand. His gaze, tracing the back of my left hand, was persistent and sticky.

To try and cut off Jung Garam's focus, I crossed my arms, covering my hands, and called out to him, "Jung Garam."

“Hm?”

“If you [possess] my body, you definitely won’t be beaten by Moon Issak. Right?”

“……”

Jung Garam opened his mouth, as if he were about to answer immediately, but in the end he just remained silent, staring at me without saying a word.

I had a sense of what was causing Garam’s hesitation, so I took a step closer to him. For the first time, Garam backed away from me, avoiding me as I approached.

I quickly reached out and grabbed Jung Garam’s shoulder as he tried to creep back. “No, it’s good. It’s all good, but… You don’t know what Moon Issak has prepared. If, Choi Lee-kyung, your body is snatched again, I really…”

I was a little shocked to see that the young Assassin had lost so much confidence. I tried to hide those feelings and instead tried to be firm, “Then, are you going to let it be? No matter how weak I am, you just need to do what you can, right?”

Jung Garam looked at me with slightly widened eyes, seemingly startled. I spoke to Garam in a firm, deliberate manner, as I needed to convey these essential words to him and to everyone else, “And this time, I’ll use all of my class skills against Moon Issak. Honestly, until now, I’ve relied on you all completely and didn’t know how to use any of my abilities…”

“……”

“……”

“Moon Issak knows my class skills, but he wouldn’t be able to prepare for them. How could he prepare when I’ve never used them? Starting with

[Possession], I’m going to make the most of my various skills and deal a proper blow on him.”

As I spoke this firmly, the atmosphere around me changed.

Jung Garam’s gaze became even clearer. I silently gazed at Garam-ie’s face, which now sparkled with determination. Though he still grumbled, Jung Garam’s attitude had noticeably changed from before. “Okay, Ham-Lee-kyung. The idea of using your class skills… it doesn’t seem like a bad one.”

“Yeah.”

“But you… You’re starting to sound more and more like Dawon-hyung. Ham-Lee-kyung, that kind of tone doesn’t suit you.”

“Ah, what do you want…” I was a little flustered because I had never intended to copy Dawon-ie’s tone.

Still, instead of teasing me more, Jung Garam rose from his position and gripped my left hand tightly. It didn’t hurt much.

Jung Garam looked at the scar on my left hand and mumbled, “Well, I suppose being subjected to this or that by Ham-Lee-kyung’s body might deal a bigger impact to Moon Issak’s pride…”

“…You’re not planning to do anything strange, are you?”

“Well… hmmm?”

I just wanted him to practice moderation while in my body, but Garam-ie hummed and smiled meaningfully.

And I…

“BL…Just as I thought, it’s BL, huh.” Eunji muttered incomprehensibly; I quickly pulled my hand out of the young Assassin’s grip when she looked my way.

* * *

Once we reached a conclusion, I decided to check out my [Status Window], which I had neglected for a while now.

[**Name:** Choi Lee-kyung – Lv 461

Class: Senior Necromancer

HP: 2,800,070
MP: 401,532

Title:

Sweeter than Candy – Revenge truly is sweet.

< The title, ‘Sweeter than Candy’ can only be obtained by users who, in the pursuit of revenge, inflict irreparable damage on their target without suffering retaliation or damage in return. While using this title, the title’s special skill, ‘Counter Attack’ may activate– doubling the damage from an enemy’s physical or magic attack and returning it back at the opponent.>

Those Who Cross the Line – Not all are fortunate enough to come back from the brink of death.

<The title ‘Those Who Cross the Line’ increases luck by +10% while the title is being used. There is a 0.1% chance you can avoid instant death.>

Greenhorn Adventurer – You’ve tasted the bitterness of life!

<While using the title ‘Greenhorn Adventurer’, movement speed will increase by 5%>

Main Stats (The three highest stats will be preferentially shown here):
Magic: 1,120
Magic control: 13.3%
Movement Speed: 31.2% (+7.23%)]

So far, there hasn’t been any significant change except for a slight increase in levels and stats.

When I saw the title, <Sweeter than Candy>, I couldn’t help but think of Moon Issak. Without lingering further, I started to scroll down, slowly scanning my class skill list.

>Skill

– Summon Evil Spirits

[Summon Vengeful Ghosts: Proficiency 100%, Rank: Highest Rank]

[Summon Sacrificial Offering: Proficiency 0.7%, Rank: Lowest Rank]

-**Possession**

When certain conditions are met, the Servant can use the Summoner’s body.

– Death Mark

After special conditions are met, you can attach a death mark to the enemy. A living enemy marked by death will suffer a significant loss in defense; Furthermore, you can gain additional experience from the marked enemy.

– Shinigami’s Book

You can summon a soul within one hour after their death and look into the soul’s memories.

– Seal Spirit

You can seal a soul into a weapon in order to enchant it.

– Eternal Night (Field Type)

The Necromancer can create the best possible environment for themselves within a set range. Up to 12 hours.

-Deadly Kiss (Buff Type)

Boosts the morale of the deceased. Increases the abilities of a servant who receives the Necromancer’s kiss by 100%. Lasts up to 30 minutes. Cooldown time: 12 hours. The higher the Necromancer’s level, the shorter the cooldown time.

It seems as if my class skills increased by one every time I gained another servant. However, the descriptions were brief, and there were many skills I had never used before. So, I didn’t have a good sense of how to utilize them. I wasn’t sure how to use them effectively.

“Anyway, I’m sure I’ll figure them out once I use th…. Huh?”

However, my plan to seriously focus and study the skills was waylaid as soon as I read the description of the last skill–the one I had gained after my new contract with Bang Eunji.

Bewildered, I reread the description of the final skill. “Necromancer’s… I-It wants me to do what?!'”

—

Become a member!

Buy Me a Coffee

TL: I just KNEW this would happen. Ofc there’s a kiss skill! It’s what always happens between master/servant classes. O.O

Woo Ragi won’t like this lmao.

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Chapter 361

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“What’s wrong?”

At that moment, Seo Dawon suddenly stood in front of me and looked at my status window. He then read the skill, and I wasn’t able to hide it.

He grinned, “Ah–is it because of your new skill?”

“Yeah….”

“It doesn’t say the kiss needs to be on the lips.”

“Ah! Th-That’s right…” I was a little relieved at Seo Dawon’s loophole.

But, the Mage soon added, mischievously, “Except for when you use that skill on me, of course. It’d be best to kiss the others on their hands or cheeks.”

“…Shut up.” Though I was likely to use this skill in combat, I wanted to scold his arrogant certainty that I would kiss him on his lips.

But, I couldn’t hardly make a ruckus in front of the servants who were watching us. I swallowed a sigh and approached the servants.

Then, our long meeting began.

* * *

“The training room allows you to modify various settings and room conditions with [Mode Setting] to create a more immersive environment for training. Also, if you feel any difficulties during training, you can always call out for [Mode Settings] and shout ‘End.'”

First, people suggested that I assess the power of my class skills. So, I chose to use a training room within Koo Hui-seo’s mansion.

One of the occupants of this mansion handed over a controller and told me how to use the training room.

We ran the training module as explained, “[Mode Settings].”

[Beginning Training.]

[An existing training program has been saved. Should this program be recalled?]

Lines were being drawn in this white and empty space, just like a new computer program being loaded onto the screen.

I inquired whether or not Kim Sangyoon, who had been using this room before, should have his records and setting saved. Afterwards, I pressed the [No] button and chose the [Tutorial] mode to warm up.

[The ‘Tutorial Mode’ has been selected]

[Machine sensitivity…has been set at 25%]

[The Engine is running…]

[The Map will be randomly generated.]

Then, a bright light filled the space. When I closed my eyes reflexively before opening them again, the room had surprisingly changed into a vast desert. “Wow…”

My mouth fell open–it felt as if I had entered a dungeon.

Seo Dawon, who had been standing silently beside me, kicked the sand. “I guess this is version 2.5.”

“Hm?”

“I’m saying it’s old-fashioned. At the time of my death, 2.5 was the latest version.”

“What? You used this sort of training room too?”

“Yeah. I used it whenever I cooked up a good skill.”

Well, come to think of it, this man was crazy about his scenario, so it would have been weird if he didn’t have something similar.

I looked around, a bit discomfited, at the world that almost seemed real. They said I was free to use any skill here, hm… “Then… What should I start with?”

“Why not go in order? Except for [Possession].”

“Mmm. Alright.” As soon as I nodded, a [Black Slime] crept out of the desert sands.

[Bbooo—]

[Blop–!]

The slimes looked like round droplets of water; unlike regular monsters, they didn’t attack me though they noticed me. Perhaps this was because we were in tutorial mode.

So, I was able to relax and use my class skill,targeting the [Black Slime]. First, I wanted to try out [Dead Mark].

“[Dead Mark]!”

I wasn’t sure what the ‘special conditions’ written in the skill description was, but, judging how the activate button was lighting up, it seems the skill could be used.

As the skill processed, I pressed on the skill’s name in order to read what those special conditions were.

[Dead Mark is triggered when you target a living creature with high defense power.]

[This ‘Training-use Black Slime’ has twice as much defense as ‘Choi Lee-kyung-nim’.]

In other words, the skill was triggered when my defense was lower than that of my opponent. In addition, there were a total of eight black slimes summoned to the arena, and [Dead Mark] symbol only appeared above the heads of three black slimes.

I didn’t know if there were only a total of three [Dead Marks] available at a time, or if the skill was triggered at a certain percentage or some random probability. But, first, I ordered Seo Dawon to attack, “Attack them for me.”

“[Lightning Bolt].” Seo Dawon raised his hands before slowly cutting across the air horizontally.

I checked the difference in damage between the slimes without [Dead Mark] and slimes with the marker–and, there was a clear difference. In fact, there was twice as much difference in damage.

“Wow, this…. hasn’t your offense basically been doubled?”

“It seems like [Dead Mark] will need to be part of your basic repertoire? Why don’t you use it again.”

“Sure.” I summoned the [black slimes] again. Then, once more, I utilized the [Dead Mark] skill. “Huh? There’s five markers this time.”

“I think it randomly designates six or less targets. Stuff like that is called ‘Dice Targeting’ and is common in certain debuffs.”

“Aha…”

As Seo Dawon said, though we tested the skill several more times, the target markers did not extend beyond six.

Also, [Dead Mark] recognized when my defense increased beyond that of my enemy, so I wouldn’t be able to use the DAA combat suit’s skill.

However, Seo Dawon shored up even those weaknesses. “You can disable the combat uniform when using the skill. After using [Dead Mark], you can reapply the uniform’s ability.”

“Oh~….”

“This is called ‘switching,’ and most Users will use this trick.”

“I see.”

In any case, [Dead Mark] was a pretty good skill. I decided to actively utilize this ability and turned to the next skill on my list.

I approached the dead [Black Slime]–laying on its side with a [x_x] expression on its face. Then, I invoked [Shinigami's Book].

[Bringing back the memory of the dead….]

[This is not a valid target for the 'Shinigami's Book.']

[The skill has been canceled]

However, it seems like I couldn't invoke [The Shinigami's Book] with a [Black Slime]. The issue must be that the target was a monster. "Do you think this skill is only valid with Users?" I asked.

"There's a high probability that that's the case. Or, perhaps we should summon a high-ranked monster?"

"Is that possible?

"Yeah. Just turn off the tutorial mode and summon a level 1 boss."

When Seo Dawon handed over the controller, I chose the mode as per his suggestion. Following that, I selected the boss monster.

[Boom–! Crash–!!!]

Then, a large [Giant Black Slime] with a crown atop its head appeared before my eyes.

"[Wind Cutter]." Of course, the Mage blocked the way in front of me and immediately cut its body in half with one hand gesture.

I tried to invoke the [Shinigami’s Book] once more on the dead [Giant Black Slime], but it failed again. We decided to put a hold on this skill for a while.

[**– Seal Spirit**

You can seal a soul into a weapon in order to enchant it.]

“This skill also mentions souls, so I don’t think it’ll work…”

“Let’s just try–we’ll give it a pass if it doesn’t work.”

And, as expected, the skill was canceled with the [Invalid Target] message. I wasn’t so disappointed because I fully expected that result.

However, I made a mental note to use these two skills once I had obtained a corpse after revenge. It didn’t matter if it was Bae Jaemin or one of his henchmen.

Folding away my wistful heart, I read the next skill.

[- Eternal Night (Field Type)

The Necromancer can create the best possible environment for themselves within a set range.]

“I really can’t get a grasp for this one,” I muttered.

“You want to try it?”

"…Yeah." I was a little nervous at the ambiguous explanation, but that also made my expectations rise. I took a deep breath and opened my mouth, "[Eternal Night]."

The moment I shouted the skill, the desert sky, which had been shining all this while, suddenly darkened. I looked up in amazement, "The moon…"

Seo Dawon also stared at the sky.It was as if the sun had disappeared behind some dark clouds, and the desert became as dark as if night had fallen.

And, before I knew it, a red moon was rising in the sky. It was as if the subtle change in environment that appeared whenever I summoned a servant had rapidly emerged with the advent of the skill.

[Eternal Night – Deploying the field]

[Within the designated area, the deceased and the Apostles of Retrograde receive the blessing of the Nameless Deity, increasing their attack power by 200%.]

[The Goddess's graces and the Apostles of Order will suffer continuous health or stamina depletion within the field.]

[The madness of evil-aligned users intensifies.]

[Those who don't have shadows maintain infinite health and stamina within the eternal night.]

However, the awe-inspiring nature of the red moon was nothing compared to the effectiveness of the skill. My eyes opened wide as I read [Eternal Night]'s effects.

—-

Become a member!

TL: Um????? Hello? OP Skill????

Also, I’m mega sick, and my foggy brain can’t decide if here means health or stamina–If the comments have opinions, I’m open to it.

I can’t believe we’re finally seeing what all the skills do O.O

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Chapter 362

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“The effect is incredible….” I exclaimed and looked back.

However, unlike me, Seo Dawon’s expression wasn’t so bright. I peered at him, trying to figure out what was wrong. There was something about Dawon’s appearance that seemed unsettling.

‘Ara? His eyes…’

Dawon-ie’s eyes were black, not red. As if he had felt my gaze, Dawon-ie looked up, and I realized that the color of his eyes weren’t pure black but a red that had darkened–not unlike a shadowed, maroon deoxygenated blood color.

I grabbed him by the arm, suspicious of the change. “Are you alright?” I asked.

Dawon-ie answered half a beat late, “Mm, this… I think us Servants will need some training to adapt.”

“Really?”

“…I think the skill is subtly suggesting or informing our emotions. My mood is changing willfully,” with that said, Dawon-ie lightly swept back his bangs. It felt like he’d explode at the slightest touch.

Worried, I cupped his face with both hands. Dawon opened his eyes wide before shooting me a straightforward gaze.

“Are you feeling unwell right now?” I asked.

“……” The mage hesitated to answer, blinked, and dragged me closer with one arm. “Mmn. Shall we move on to the next skill?”

“Huh? No. W-Wait…”

While he briefly halted as I requested, his cold, firm hand was already wrapped around my back.

While maintaining that pose, Seo Dawon whispered, “And, about that last skill… Only use it with me from now on, Lee-kyung-ah.”

“That’s…”

“I think I’ve been plenty obedient and endured letting others use [Possession].”

At first, I thought this was another mischievous joke, but the following words clued me in to his sincerity.

Actually, I had originally thought that [Deadly Kiss] should be reserved for the Mage, but… How should I put this… His uncharacteristic possessiveness made me chuckle?

Seo Dawon looked at my chuckling self with a bit of dissatisfaction in his gaze; he pouted as if he were protesting.

As soon as he parted his lips, I retorted, “I’m the one using the skill though?”

“Don’t do it to their cheeks or hands–that was just a smokescreen. Now that I’ve thought about it, I can’t compromise.”

“Are you listening to me?”

“And, what do you think about occasionally kissing me while pretending to use the skill?”

“…Are you stupid? It’s too obvious, we’ll be found out…” While I reflexively retorted, in truth I didn’t really mind Seo Dawon’s strange persistence… I guess there’s no helping me. [1]

I bit my slightly trembling lips and grabbed Seo Dawon’s collar. Then, with ulterior motives lining my every action, I invoked [Deadly Kiss].

* * *

“Was the training room demolished again?”

“…Ah, yes. We were just… testing out some skills…”

“I suppose Seo Dawon-nim made something amazing in there again.”

“……”

“Ham-Lee-kyung! What was all that commotion in there?”

I vaguely answered Kim Sangyoon’s question and glared at Jung Garam’s pointed jibes. Of course, the Assassin had no tact and witlessly kept remarking, “Hm? Why are your lips so swollen?”

‘…Be quiet.’ I silently warned Jung Garam; ears heating up, I pursed my lips and turned my head. Why was he inquiring about that all of a sudden anyway?

Furthermore, I couldn’t even blame Seo Dawon this time. Though he seduced me, I was the one who went wild.

After all, recently, Seo Dawon treated me like some fragile piece of sugar-sculpture candy and refrained from any kind of physical contact. This level of intimacy had been long overdue, so I kept holding onto the Mage, continuing to kiss until things got out of hand…until it was obvious to anyone with eyes to see what had happened between us.

‘So annoying…’ I felt wronged–why, unlike me, was Seo Dawon so clean and put together? Honestly–why must I be the one to feel ashamed? This wasn’t something I could do alone.

However, Dawon-ie merely smiled secretively, gazing at my lips through my glares.

“Is he enjoying himself?’ I looked at the bastard before sighing deeply. In any case, today was my fault. It wouldn’t be right to blame the Servant when I was the one who willingly succumbed.

Still, I had done what I had set out to do–judge the strength and purpose of my skills. I had seen the power of [Deadly Kiss] as well. So, I answered Kim Sangyoon, who had been peeking around the training room, honestly, “Actually, Dawon-ie didn’t invent anything new. It’s just… He was just observing since my skills had increased in power.”

“Is that possible for me as well?” Kim Sangyoon’s eyes sparkled.

‘This person’s attitude has seriously changed.’ I could feel the difference in mindset; it felt like he was now wholly focused on becoming stronger, unlike before.

In particular, I couldn’t help but compare the person who used to startle, be anxious, and avoid things whenever I mentioned Seo Dawon’s name to the person now who would be willing to follow the Mage even if he ordered the Warrior to swallow poison in order to grow stronger.

‘That’s why I called for him…’

In reality, the class-skill training could have been done with just the servants, but it seemed like Kim Sangyoon could gain a lot from being here. Furthermore, the servants didn’t object to his presence; both they and I had high expectations for this training.

“Yes. I believe Sangyoon-ssi would find it beneficial as well.”

“Really?” Kim Sangyoon’s face lit up, and he clenched his fists. He looked as if he wanted to jump into training right away, but we waited a little while longer. One person wasn’t here yet.

And…

“Hellooo…?” With a baby sash strapped to his chest and a baby in his arms, Koo Hui-seo finally entered the training room. Kim Sangyoon looked momentarily nervous, but then he calmed down, relaxing his expression.

“Hello.”

“Yees…”

“Lackey!” However, as soon as the baby in Koo Hui-seo’s arms saw me, he shouted ‘Lackey.’ I did a double take at the child, surprised by his clear pronunciation.

He had clearly grown up even though it had only been a few weeks since birth. It wasn’t just his pronunciation–even his expressions were clear.

The baby struggled in Koo Hui-seo’s arms before shouting loudly, “Lackey!”

Then, he enthusiastically stared at the skeleton dangling at my hip.

[Clack Clack Clack…]

[Don’t wanna…]

Lackey shook his head and looked warily at the baby. Rather than fear, it seemed to adopt an attitude of finding the child troublesome more than anything. As if it hated the idea of looking after something younger than it.

I approached Koo Hui-seo with a clumsy smile. I heard he's fallen into the pit of taking care of his child, always hovering around his son… I had no idea he would even go so far as to wear an uncharacteristic baby sash.

'Nevertheless, he looks a bit more… normal now?'

Koo Hui-seo's mental anguish–which I had been worried about up until Koo Kyungman died–seemed to have vastly subsided with the baby's birth.

The baby seems to have recognized Koo Hui-seo as a guardian for now–though his eyes were attached to Lackey, his fist was tightly holding onto the front of his blouse.

The baby, in turn, glanced between the Lackey and Koo Hui-seo and whimpered, as if he firmly believed that whatever it wanted could be obtained by pestering and begging them. Koo Hui-seo perceived that trust and responded with a loving smile, kissing the baby's forehead.

Koo Hui-seo spoke to me without even bothering to say some greetings, "The baby… really likes Lackey… I tried giving him another skeleton; he was happy at first, but, when it didn't move like Lackey did, he ended up bawling and weeping…"

Hearing that, I was feeling a bit suspicious and replied firmly, "I can't give Lackey to you–it's not a toy."

"I know… But, still, can't you bring it to the baby once a day? He's crying and refusing to eat…"

"……"

I hesitated a bit because this was a rather awkward request from a novice dad. Lackey nibbled, so it wouldn't hurt, on the baby's hand which still struggled to reach the skeleton.

"Kyahaha!" The baby smiled and tilted his head as if he were enjoying this.

The baby’s bright expression was somewhat healing. Even Kim Sangyoon, whose finger was broken by that baby, couldn’t help but gaze adoringly at him.

—

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a member!

TL: Oh god, Koo Hui-seo’s kid is going to be so so so spoiled.

Footnotes

1. He’s talking about his broken red-flag-dar.

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As I looked down at the skeleton, I guessed that Lackey seemed a bit annoyed, but it played with the baby in its own way.

The skeleton didn't show any signs of getting angry or frustrated when the child's soft hands stroked its cheeks or when his feet slammed its shoulder. Lackey was a smart little thing and seemed to know that the baby had no malicious intent behind its behavior.

'It doesn't seem to…hate this entirely.'

In the end, I accepted Koo Hui-seo's request conditionally, "Well… If this won't take too long, I can take some time out of our schedule."

"Thank you, truly, Lee-kyung-ssi…" Koo Hui-seo sighed as he untied the baby sash and handed the baby to the skeleton.

I felt a little bewildered at the scene, but Lackey embraced the child who was clinging to its skull with determined arms.

The baby hugged and sucked on Lackey's skull as if it had starved for several years. He placed his fingers inside the skeleton's empty eye sockets as well.

'Why does he like Lackey so much…'

From the very beginning, I felt that this baby was incredibly unique. I wondered if he was too obsessed with Lackey.

“Lackey!!!”

Of course, the skeleton didn’t seem to be too pleased at being the focus of the child’s obsession. But, since the baby didn’t seem to be acting purposefully, I eventually just gently detached the baby when he clung too forcefully. I didn’t actively prevent or detain the child.

Lackey stayed still, patiently enduring the baby’s enthusiastic teeth acupuncture session, but, when the baby’s mouth did not take a rest, the skeleton scooped the baby up roughly–like a bag of potatoes–and dragged him around the room. Fortunately, the baby loved this careless treatment, shrieking in glee.

Lackey held the wriggling baby more and more carelessly, to the point where it was practically dragging the baby by the armpits with one hand while using the other hand to support the baby’s bottom.

Each time Lackey completed a lap around the room, it stared at me as if waiting for approval, as if it were asking, ‘Is this enough?’

“How kind of you…” After about five laps, I nodded to Lackey with a sorry heart.

As soon as it got my permission, Lackey threw the baby away and ran to me. I was surprised at the sudden throw, but, fortunately, the nanny was standing nearby and quickly picked up the baby.

“Uwahhh!” The baby began to cry loudly as soon as the skeleton moved away, but he did not threaten others with the tentacles on his back as he had done before. He simply sobbed and expressed his complaints to the Lackey, who had turned away from him.

“Uwahhh!”

[Clack clack clack.]

[So loud.]

Lackey glared at the baby coldly before running to me and hugging me.

The baby struggled and tried to get Lackey's attention anyway he could. Meanwhile, his abundant tears drenched his face; he looked utterly pitiful. "Lakweee…"

The baby, shedding enough tears to make his nanny's shirt cuff transparent, finally stuck out its lower lip as Lackey refused to look at him.

However, when the skeleton snuck a glance at the baby, the baby was quick to adopt a pitiful expression again, squeezing tears out of his eyes by opening and closing his eyelids tightly. That behavior was so honestly cute; I bit my lower lip to hold back my laughter.

"The baby…is so stubborn, I find it difficult…" Koo Hui-seo approached the baby's side and wiped away his tears. However, the baby refused his dad's touch and continued to stare at Lackey.

Looking at those obsessed eyes, I could see his resemblance to Koo Hui-seo. However, Koo Hui-seo continued firmly, like an ordinary father to a baby that kept trying to crawl out of his nanny's arms, "If you don't stop crying, I won't let you play with Lackey from now on."

"Ummummm…" Perhaps because of his father's strict tone, the baby closed his mouth and whimpered. However, his eyes were still fixed on the skeleton burying itself in my stomach.

"An attachment doll…?" [1]

Lackey stared up at my casual mutter, wondering what I could be talking about.

At that moment, Dawon-ie laughed and said, "Lackey. If you keep bothering us, should I give you to him?"

[Clack Clack Clack Clack Clack Clack!!!]

[Hate it hate it hate it hate it hate it!!!]

I shot daggers at the Mage through the corners of my eyes and dragged the skeleton into my arms, “What nonsense. I’m never giving Lackey away, so stop bothering it.”

[Clack Clack Clack…]

[Master…]

Lackey looked at me with twinkling, tearful crimson eyes.

Why was Seo Dawon always picking fights with Lackey–a skeleton that looked less than 10 years old. So, when Lackey unhinged its jaw to bite the Mage, I let it happen.

With a–as far as anyone could see–delighted face, Seo Dawon picked up the skeleton and said, with a deliberately despicable tone, “What use are you except as a doll when you’re this slow?”

[Clack Clack Clack clack clack!]

[I’ll kill you!]

I truly thought a meaningless fight would break out at this rate, so I calmed down the skeleton in my arms. I told Koo Hui-seo, “Koo Hui-seo-

ssi, I’m sorry but I think the baby is going to have to exit this room momentarily.”

“Yees… It’s time for his nap soon anyway.” When Koo Hui-seo looked at the baby, the nanny took the baby and quietly opened the door. The baby seemed like it was about to cry again, but Koo Hui-seo placed an index finger against his and said, “Shh,” which ultimately made the baby restrain himself.

* * *

A short while after the baby left, Kim Sangyoon said, “I… I’m saying this because Seo Dawon-nim seems to be here as well, but…”

“Yes? Ah–yeah…”

“Would Seo Dawon-nim or the other resentful ghosts give me some signal to show their presence…?”

With that said, Kim Sangyoon looked around at some completely wrong location–the place where Lackey had attacked Seo Dawon just recently.

I felt sorry for not being considerate to the Warrior, and my worries that I had temporarily set aside resurged.

However, now that even Kim Sangyoon expressed discomfort, it was impossible to continue to feign ignorance. I struggled to open my mouth, “Ah… We actually talked about that.”

“Really?”

Actually, we needed to train together, but the fact that Kim Sangyoon couldn’t see the Red Lotus was a huge issue. Even if we worked well together, it would be challenging to engage in combat without knowing where our comrades were.

Of course, I could summon the servants, but the Warrior would need to collaborate with the others–the ones that weren't summoned. They'd need to move as one to be a team.

So, at the very least, Kim Sangyoon needed a way to recognize their presence and be able to communicate with them. That's why we devised a tool through Seo Dawon's design, Koo Hui-seo's money, and Choi Kyung-sik's handicraft.

However, there was one problem.

Its performance was exceptional, but… The item's design… truly sucked. I took out the pre prepared item from my inventory, hoping Kim Sangyoon wouldn't take offense.

My hand trembled slightly as I handed the item to Kim Sangyun.

"Um… when you wear this item, you should be able to see all the servants I've contracted, and you should be able to hear their voices… At least that's what Dawon-ie said."

Kim Sangyoon's voice shook when he saw what I had presented, "This… Dog… Um, necklace?"

"…Yes."

"……" Kim Sangyoon's face turned red with either shame or anger–I had no idea which emotion it was. I looked away from that bewildered expression.

In fact, after I received the finished product, I also questioned if this made sense. Choi Kyung-sik and Seo Dawon began using jargon to argue that, functionally, a dog-collar design was the best.

Although it was clear to me, even as someone unfamiliar with item crafting, that there was malice behind their words, I ultimately had no way to prove it and had to hand the item over to Kim Sangyoon as it was.

Still, I couldn’t help but feel sorry, so I cautiously advised him on how to wear the collar. “I-If you wear it under your combat uniform, I don’t think it’ll be noticeable….”

“Haah…” Kim Sangyoon exhaled deeply before grinding his teeth, but, eventually, he accepted the dog collar. Then, he closed his eyes tightly and clasped the lock around his neck.

—-

Become a member!

TL: Man, Koo Hui-seo is already whipped by his baby.

Footnotes

1. An attachment doll is a doll that a child carries specifically as a replacement for the caregiver. See doll-therapy and psychoanalysis

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To put that around the neck of a normal, adult man… It wasn't as bad as I thought it'd be.

Perhaps it was the black strap? Rather than calling it masculine, it felt more like a fashion item? Kim Sangyoon's hair was a flashy red, like a musician. In a rock band…

'It looks unexpectedly good…'

Of course, I kept my mouth shut because I knew I shouldn't voice my honest feelings.

Simultaneously, Kim Sangyoon opened his tightly closed eyes, "W-whoa!"

He jumped a bit as he looked around. For someone who couldn't see the others around just earlier, perhaps the sudden appearance of the servants startled him.

After whipping his head around like crazy, trying to take in his surroundings, Kim Sangyoon returned to his senses. Opening his mouth, he complained in a bit of a whiny tone, "…You didn't tell me there would be this many of them."

"That's… It was never the right time to talk about it."

"Haah…"

“That collar suits you, Sangyoon-ah.” At that moment, upon seeing Kim Sangyoon, Seo Dawon started a quarrel, teasing the Warrior. Kim Sangyoon raised his eyebrows at the malice for one moment, but he retreated like a puppy with its tail between its legs when he met the Mage’s eyes.

However, Seo Dawon laughed and continued to make fun of Kim Sangyoon until the very end, “What, not even a thanks?”

At that, Kim Sangyoon frowned and timidly answered, “…If you like things like this, maybe you should wear one yourself.”

“My taste? It’s totally tailored to Lee-kyung-ie’s taste.”

“Huh….?”

“What? What do you mean the ‘dog collar’ is because of *my* taste!!”

But, Seo Dawon ignored me and gave us a foxy smile, “Lee-kyung-ie likes to be called Master too.”

“…Master?”

“No–you!” I shouted in anger because Dawon-ie was suddenly framing me as some bizarre pervert. However, for some reason, Kim Sangyoon’s face brightened significantly, as if Seo Dawon’s words were somewhat comforting. I lost the opportunity to explain while I stumbled over my words.

As I stuttered, Kim Sangyoon shouted resolutely, as if he had made some big decisions, “I-I… If Lee-kyung-nim would like to be called Master, from now on I’ll…”

“No, no! It’s alright. Isn’t it obvious that Dawon-ie is joking around?!”

If I were to let this be, the Warrior would really start calling me Master with a straight face! I mean, unless someone’s a pervert, who in their right mind would actually enjoy such a title!

However, to make matters worse, the servants didn’t miss this opportunity.

“Why are you denying it, Choi Lee-kyung. Don’t you like the title Master?” Kim Olim, who I had trusted, was just the beginning. She, with a steady face as always, recited a forgotten passage from my diary. “‘Lackey called me ‘Master’… I might end up with over a thousand skeletal soldiers calling me ‘Master’ in the end, right? Haha!’ That’s what you wrote. It’s from your February 8th, last year, entry. I read this diary about ten times and memorized it, so I can’t be wrong.”

“AaarrghH! What are you even saying!”

Another person didn’t care about my screams. Choi Kyung-sik, as if he had been waiting for this moment, said with a smug expression, “Choi Lee-kyung-ssi. You chose to be a necromancer over being an alchemist. It’s common sense that you wouldn’t choose to be a necromancer, unless… your desire to dominate is higher than your desire for money or honor.”

I shouted angrily, “You–how the hell do you know that?!”

“You wrote it in your diary, didn’t you? It’s as if you wanted us to know.”

“Who would expect for others to read their diary! Only I should be able to read that!”

However, no servants took my side.

“Hmmm~ I see. Choi Lee-kyung, you were excited to hear me call you Owner, huh?”

“You’ve never called me Owner, though??” I grit my teeth as I looked at Jung Garam.

But at that time, Woo Ragi, who had been silent, suddenly shot me an unsettled and displeasing look. Then, in a voice too loud to be called a mutter, said to himself, “Fucking creepy. He’s not going to outfit us all with collars later, right?”

I couldn’t hold back my anger, so I grinded my teeth as I replied, “You really know how to push me!”

Despite that, Woo Ragi said, “Ohh… super scary.” Then, he laughed openly.

Finally, Eunji, who had been observing us, touched her arm-length gloves and said gracefully, “Mmn. Then, please call Eunji, Princess.”

“Honestly, what sort of nickname is that? Owner… Master… I’ve never asked any of you guys to call me that??!!”

“Ownerrr….” Even Koo Hui-seo added in his own two cents, making my blood pressure rise and my vision grow dark.

And Seo Dawon, the mastermind behind this debacle, quickly supported me. In an despicable tone, he stated, “Then, since we’ve decided on code names for each other, shall we begin to train properly?”

“What?!”

* * *

“Ah, Master, you’re so fucking slow.”

“Haack, haagh…” I had been forcibly referred to as ‘Master’ for 20 minutes, after which we began training in earnest with the servants, Koo Hui-seo, and Kim Sangyoon at Training level 3. We aimed to coordinate our movements and class skills.

Moreover, I was told that during this training session, I’d be called various titles like ‘Master.’ They even mentioned that in real combat, even more ridiculous codenames could be utilized.

However, I didn’t think Seo Dawon’s primary motive was to get me used to codenames in a combat scenario. He probably just found this fun. Still, I couldn’t help but let myself be deceived by his hasty excuse.

Above all, the nickname wasn’t the major issue. I had found, through our training, that I was much more of a burden than I had imagined.

In particular, I had an issue with ‘using skills while moving from one cover to the next.’ I got out of breath just from moving to the next safe spot; my field of vision gradually narrowed as less and less oxygen reached my brain.

“Your class skills are excellent, however Master is the one who can use it. So, we must always look ahead, predict how far we’ve travelled, and guess where the enemy will be aiming. Especially you–you’re the most conspicuous target, so there’s a high probability that you’ll be targeted.

She was right.

Oddly enough, the monsters in the training room seemed to focus only on me, completely ignoring the other servants, Koo Hui-seo, and Kim Sangyoon. They rarely even approached Seo Dawon, whom I had summoned. The observing servants also notified me multiple times that my movements were especially eye-catching.

In particular, Woo Ragi’s nagging almost triggered PTSD of my military days. I clenched my teeth and ran after Kim Sangyoon and Kim Olim once more, tensing the muscles in my knees.

I had to master [Guerilla tactics and training] in this session: killing monsters and reaching my destination without being noticed.

Since we would most likely be facing Bae Jaemin in the future, I needed to observe my teammates’ movements from either the front or the rear and use the appropriate skills to assist them.

But, I wasn’t very good at looking ahead.

“Master, lower your head.”

“Nnngh….”

“Maaastterrr~ Wanna use [Possession]?”

“Not yet…!”

“Hey, Mr. Master? Are you there yet?”

“W-Wait!”

As a result, I had difficulties in timing my skills. I clenched my teeth, frustrated, while waiting for Seo Dawon’s signal, despite the calls of ‘Master’ coming from all directions.

Seo Dawon caught the attention of a few [Minotaurs] and sent me a look. I realized that his gaze was a signal and soon aimed for where the Mage would target his skill. “[Dead Mark]!”

I aimed for an empty space as the Mage instructed but, once again, I felt like our timing was a little off. Furthermore, after using my skill, I always caught the monster’s eyes…

I ran as fast as I could as I felt their aggro snap onto me–the horned half-men half-bull creatures rushed after me. Frustration mixed with fear welled up within me. Why on earth isn’t this working?!

“Master-ah, if this continues, you might end up turning into a pork cutlet.”

At Garam-ie’s urging, I had no choice but to open my mouth, “Damn it… [Possession]!”

[Searching for synchronization rate…]

And soon, I was gazing at my body with my own eyes.

Jung Garam had soon ducked into the dense underbrush, and the [Minotaurs] lost sight of my body. I released a deep sigh when I saw the difference between our movements–his control versus mine was like night and day.

From within my body, Garam-ie smugly mouthed, ‘Just do as I did!’

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a member!

TL: That feel when both Lee-kyung and I were like “Shit, collar’s hot on beefy dudes.”

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Chapter 365

Chapter 365

‘If it was as easy as he makes it sounds, I would have done it immediately. Damn it.’

I felt frustrated as I saw Jung Garam using my body. I understood that there was a difference in the way we moved, but I couldn’t understand that difference well through just observation.

In the end, our first training session, which lasted three hours, ended without much gain except in helping the other servants to match each other’s movements… and for Koo Hui-seo and Kim Sangyoon to be added into our formations.

Because I didn’t think this could continue, I asked Garam-ie to tutor me one-on-one. After Seo Dawon, he, as a close-range damage dealer, would be the second-best opponent to force me to move my body.

Garam readily agreed yes, saying that it’d be fun. “Ham-Lee-kyung, first of all, your walking sounds too loud.”

“What do you mean by loud?”

“You’re making too much noise, and you have unnecessary movements– that’s what makes you stand out. It feels like you’re the only one that’s wearing flashy clothes while running about.” Then, Garam said he’d show me directly and told me to summon him.

“[Jung Garam].”

As soon as his body materialized, Garam-ie proceeded to show me various movements, such as jumping in place, lying down, or running in place.

Even though the young Assassin moved at a great speed, he made no sound. Like a cat, only light taps accompanied his steps.

On the other hand, a heavy thump accompanied my movements. Of course, I weighed more than Garam-ie but… no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't reduce my sledge-hammer like footsteps.

"What kind of shoes do you use?" I asked.

"Ah, geez, then why don't we go barefoot?"

I suspected that Garam was using an item, but that was impossible because he continued with his suggestion to run barefoot.

He even executed a training program in the training room and demonstrated jumping down from a tree about 10 meters high. Garam told me to turn around while he did it, and when I felt that he had landed, he instructed me to look back.

Of course, I was unable to notice his landing. It wasn't until Garam-ie had playfully hugged my neck, startling me, that I realized his presence.

I asked if he had used a skill, but Garam-ie corrected my misconception again. "If you need to use skills to move around like this, then you won't be able to use them when you really need the boost."

After saying that, he raised his heels and demonstrated how I should move. However, after walking as Garam-ie had demonstrated, I felt pain bursting through my calves, and I couldn't move as I had intended.

"You really have no idea how to use your muscles."

"……"

After running through simulations, Garam-ie prescribed at least 2 hours of strength training per day. “Well, I can teach you ways to hide or utilize misdirection… But, Ham-Lee-kyung, your body is the issue. There’s not much you can do with your fluttering, paper-doll-like body.”

“Is it really that bad?”

“Yep!”

When Garam-ie nodded without a second thought, I felt frustrated.

Honestly, I had no time to build a body when we needed to capture Moon Issak and Bae Jaemin straight away.

However, Garam-ie noticed my impatience, and said, “Honestly, you have high mental fortitude compared to your trashy body. If we can just tame your body–a bit–you’ll get better immediately.”

“R-Really?”

“Yeah. And, don’t you have a lot of high-quality people surrounding you who can help you grow quickly? There’s not only Dawon-ie hyung, but also Koo Hui-seo as well. Also, there’s peers at a similar to slightly better level with you–Kim Sangyoon. You two can motivate each other to improve together.”

“……”

“This is the best environment, to be honest.”

I still felt a bit of impatience creeping in as I listened to Jung Garam’s words.

However, according to Jung Garam’s training regimen, I changed my training method. From that day on, I immersed myself in basic physical training and occasionally participated in training alongside my Servants.

* * *

“This is Today’s Meal, Master.”

“……”

Since that day Choi Kyung-sik had been making fun of me, calling me Master, he had also been brewing potions.

I sighed once more as today, like the days before it, Choi Kyung-sik approached with a tray full of various potions. Solid food was temporarily banned while I had to eat this enormous volume of potions.

Well, it couldn’t be helped–I needed to become stronger. Though I could accept that logic, I got queasy at the sight of the potions. I took a deep breath and tried to settle my stomach as much as possible.

‘Still, I think my hand is getting better…’

Perhaps it was due to Choi Kyung-sik’s recovery potions–or perhaps I had simply become used to this hand–but my near immobile fingers gradually felt better.

Occasionally, before going to sleep, Dawon-ie gave me a grip strenth(?) device for me to grip, and Dawon-ie also said that my condition was much better than before. So, I endured the pain of not being able to eat and diligently consumed various types of potions.

“Try this [High-Protein Rookie Gym-Rat] potion first.” [1] Choi Kyung-sik said.

“The chocolate flavor is awful.”

“That’s what I thought, so I changed it to mango flavor.”

“……” I tried to show my displeasure by criticizing its taste, but it didn’t work.

So, today, I started with the most challenging potion: the [High-Protein Rookie Gym-Rat]. Fitness enthusiasts were sure to love it, as it greatly helped with muscle growth. And, after drinking it, I did feel my body becoming stronger. The only problem was its taste. "…I finished."

"Did you drink every single drop?"

"Haah…" I didn't like sweet drinks that cloyed and clung to my mouth, but I drank everything as he told me to. However, Choi Kyung-sik immediately handed me the next potion without even giving me the chance to rinse my mouth with water.

"Here's the [Exercise for Anchovies, Awakening Potion]. If you drink this before exercising, the exercise effect is doubled."

"…Your naming sense sucks."

"Mmm, you're not angry, are you?"

"……" When I saw his wide grin, I tensed my fist. However, I held my anger in for now.

At least this potion was bite-sized, so even though it tasted horrible, I could close my eyes and swallow it right away. The cough syrup-like taste made me shudder, but at least the next potion was tolerable. My frown lessened.

"This potion raises your [Curse Resistance]. You drink this one well," Choi Kyung-sik said.

"It tastes like barley tea, so it's palatable."

"The base does contain oolong leaves, but…" Choi Kyung-sik began moving his finger in the air, as if he were taking notes.

When I saw his movements, I said, pouting, "What are you writing down now."

"I'm writing down Master's likes and dislikes."

“You say you keep notes on this, but hardly anything changes.”

“What sort of parent only gives their child what they like because they’re picky?”

I wanted to ask if I was his son, but Choi Kyung-sik popped a sour candy into my mouth while I was off-guard.

I slightly frowned, but the candy didn’t taste too bad so I sucked on it, placated.

Choi Kyung-sik smiled a bit despicably when I had no complaints. “Last is my lime-flavored [No Complaints] candy. I brought it with me when your boyfriend tipped me off that you like candy.”

“…No–Seo Dawon…!” This time, I was incredibly embarrassed, so I couldn’t help but criticize the blameless Seo Dawon. I lowered my head and swiftly finished the remaining potions before Choi Kyung-sik could further tease me.

“You drank it all,” He commented.

“…I feel like throwing up.”

“Do you want another candy?”

“…Enough.”

Fortunately, within a few minutes, my nauseated, rolling stomach subsided.

Before leaving the room, Choi Kyung-sik said, pointing to a few potions on the tray, “You should drink these four bottles after exercising. At the end, you should drink the red potions three hours afterwards.”

“Alright.”

“Then, Fighting!”

The door reopened shortly after Choi Kyung-sik left.

“Are you ready?” Kim Sangyoon inquired.

[Clack Clack Clack!]

[Master!]

“Yes.”

It was Kim Sangyoon and Lackey.

We usually trained together, so they would wait until I finished drinking my daily potions before walking together to the training room.

Today, as well, the three of us trained together again. Then, later we would gather with the rest of the servants to train our positioning.

And, the leader of our training team was…

“Then, shall we start with stretching?”

It was Kim Olim.

To be precise, I was the only one who needed to do some light stretching–Kim Sangyoon and Lackey exercised hard next to me so I wouldn’t feel alienated and uncomfortable.

I copied the posture Kim Olim indicated, but I alone kept stumbling and losing balance.

“You’re stiffer than Lackey–a skeleton, Ham-Lee-kyung-ah,” Olim said.

“……”

“Your cheeks were so fluffy… You’ve completely deceived me.”

“Just when did I deceive you?”

“Don’t talk back and keep your head down. Tense your stomach properly.”

“Haah…”

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a member!

TL: The training menu from hell… Literally…

But also, I just find it hilarious how Kim Olim is just so focused on Lee-kyung’s puffy cheeks.

Footnotes

1. is a portmanteau word combining Health and Child. This refers to rookie or beginner gym goers or weight-training students.

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Chapter 366

Chapter 366

Although I grumbled, my physical condition had improved sharply under Kim Olim’s guidance.

In particular, as I repeatedly exercised and ran, I felt that my arms and legs were getting firmer. I couldn’t run for an hour before, but now I wasn’t tired if I ran for an hour or two.

Though to be honest, compared to the average physical strength of a User, my physical strength was still low, but… In any case, I was improving day by day.

Kim Olim’s instruction was useful, but…

‘This potion is the true cheat-code.’

Choi Kyung-sik’s drug (?) played the biggest role. In the past, some fitness trainers grew their bodies by injecting steroids, and Choi Kyung-sik’s potions seemed to have a similar effect.

‘What if I become super muscular?’

Just that thought made my lips curl up in a smile. Then I recalled how Seo Dawon walked in on me posing like Popeye in the bathroom yesterday. ‘Damn… He even teased me by asking if he could hang from my arms.’

I glanced at Kim Sangyoon’s arm and thought to myself, ‘Let’s aim for a body like that.’ However, due to Olim’s keen observation, any stray

thoughts meant I had to redouble my efforts in training.

* * *

That evening, all training was paused due to urgent news. Everyone gathered in the sitting room.

Bang Eunji broke the news. “Eunji found Moon Issak–she wants to share this unusual movement.”

Bang Eunji looked at me momentarily before placing a printed photo on the center of the table. All eyes focused on it.

In the photo, Moon Issak and a familiar woman was photographed together. The picture was blurry, but the scene was etched vividly into our minds.

I soon opened my eyes wide–memories were dredged up. “Lim Jisoo…!”

“That’s right.”

Lim Jisoo–one of the main characters in [Red Lotus’s] extermination. In particular, as the person who had personally killed Dawon-ie, her sneer from the first [Vengeful Ghost Memory] would often resurface. Even now… after so much time had passed.

I wasn’t the only person that was shocked–everyone’s expressions hardened.

Choi Kyung-sik spoke first, “No way… are they holding hands?”

Bang Eunji shook her head as if she wasn’t sure, “Eunji doesn’t know about that. But…” She took out a second photo; Lim Jisoo and Moon Issak were exchanging unidentifiable boxes. “It seems like the two of them had

some deal. Given that box has the ‘inventory key’ workshop logo embossed onto the box, it’s highly likely it’s an item. Lim Jisoo handed it over.”

“Lim Jisoo gave Moon Issak some item…”

“Yes. Moon Issak also handed something to Lim Jisoo as well–it seemed to be a USB.” Bang Eunji then showed an enlarged picture of their hands. As she had said, the two were exchanging a key for a USB.

Kim Olim grimaced and asked, “Were you unable to hear what they talked about?”

“Yes. Eunji wanted to listen in, but… Eunji had to put a hold on that because Eunji couldn’t access them.”

Certainly, the picture showed that only Lim Jisoo, a member of her team, and Moon Issak were seen in a vast, open space…

Considering all that, it was remarkable that Bang Eunji found them at all. Moon Issak sold some information to Im Jisoo, so he must have gained something from this situation.

Woo Ragi said, “The data that Moon Issak could even sell… Wouldn’t that be reports from his investigation or personal details?”

“That’s highly likely.”

I asked Kim Olim carefully, “By any chance, couldn’t he have sold information about us?”

“…It’s possible,” Kim Olim seemed to be incredibly concerned about that.

Since we were already exposed to Bae Jaemin, there was a good chance that Lim Jisoo was aware of us as well. However, our major concern weren’t about any vague assumptions or knowledge about our existence but rather specific detailed information.

However, Seo Dawon spoke quite decisively, “I highly doubt that Moon Issak handed over information about Lee-kyung-ie.”

“Why?”

“Because you can’t die. If Moon Issak’s information went to Lim Jisoo, Lee-kyung-ie, your life would be in great danger. Moon Issak would have know that as well.”

I nodded, recalling the hypnosis’ influence.

However, it still wasn’t a good sign that the two contacted each other to form a deal. Furthermore, according to Eunji’s account, Moon Issak was clearly planning against her skills.

“This time, Eunji is sure of something,” Bang Eunji stated.

“Mm.”

“There’s some other helper who’s helping Moon Issak-ssi avoid Eunji’s tracking. Eunji confirmed the presence of another collaborator… though Eunji doesn’t know about their skills or even their face. Only that they exist.”

“Where did your pursuit stop?”

“Right after the transaction. As soon as Eunji turned on [Finder], they disappeared from Eunji’s sight. They even abandoned their car–they must have moved on the assumption that Eunji could catch them with her skills.”

“They’ve prepared quite thoroughly,” Choi Kyung-sik muttered, low, as if he had a headache.

I was also a little shocked to see how meticulously he prepared–I thought that Moon Issak would continue to live in a vegetative, fool-like state. I knew how difficult it was to ignore the commands the hypnosis planted in one’s head because I had experienced them myself.

‘Maybe… the ‘collaborator’ that helped him avoid Eunji’s pursuit helped in that regard as well?’

“Let’s first look for Moon Issak’s helper.” After a short silence, Dawon-ie took the initiative. All those immersed in their thoughts raised their heads and focused on the Mage.

He said, “There aren’t many users who’ve mastered stealth skills to the extent of avoiding Eunji’s finder or chaser. Also, stealth skills are often limited to classes like Assassin or Treasure Hunter.”

And, the opponent must be highly capable–enough to beat Eunji. Someone like that might unexpectedly be a well-known User.

At that time, Kim Sangyoon, while stroking his cheek, mentioned a certain User’s name. “Do you perhaps know… someone named Ha-il? This guy is a pretty famous Assassin, isn’t he?” [1]

“Hmph! Do you think that Eunji is incapable of seeing through someone like Ha-il and his subpar stealth skills?”

“S-Sorry…”

However, most users were lower level than Eunji, and anyone that didn’t make Eunji’s hackles rise up in indignation were incredibly well known, so their alibis were easy to find.

And, often, Assassins hid their identity when they reached a certain level. They followed an unspoken rule to not expose themselves.

So, we thought a bit more about the item option, but items that had [hide] or [tracking interference] enchantments weren’t very popular–high grade items of that variety were rare.

When items were made, people tended to be focused on combat options or recovery. When we checked recent transaction records, there were no instances of items with our parameters being sold. Moreover, considering Eunji’s abilities, it became even more challenging.

“It needs to be an R-grade accessory at the very least. Realistically, it’s impossible to create an item just for stealth. Because it’d be so unpopular.”

“Also, this is just Eunji’s personal opinion, but… When they disappeared, it didn’t feel like they were using an item.”

Garam, who had been silently listening, muttered, “Hmmm….” He frowned and said, “Perhaps they got an item or the helper from the black market.”

“Huh? That’s possible.” Come to think of it, Moon Issak had a black market ticket. I had a feeling that he may have obtained something at the black market and asked Garam-ie, “Is it possible to check the history of sales at the black market, like one would do for an auction house?”

“No.”

I felt desponded by the firm response. I suppose there must be a reason why these tickets were so hard to get…

However, Garam smiled and waved his finger at my disappointed self, “…Is what I would usually say, but I’m different.”

“Oh? You can do something?”

“Yep. But it’ll take some time. And, I wouldn’t be totally sure that my results are accurate. It’d be… about 70-80% right.”

Dawon nodded to Garam and said, “Well, that’s not horrible. Let’s rely on your research for now.”

“Great.”

“Can you get it by tomorrow?”

“….Ngh, I guess I have no choice but to do it.”

Become a member!

TL: I’m almost to the end of my school semester T_T

And then… I have so many teaching appointments next semester.

Also: Dun Dun Dun…. Return of Lim Jisoo!

Footnotes

1. I don’t know if (Ha-il) is a dude yet, but this is a fairly masculine name.

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Chapter 367

Chapter 367

For the next few days, Jung Garam looked busy. He talked to Seo Dawon every night. But, because Dawon's expression was as tranquil as always, I had no idea if things were progressing well or not.

Rather than thinking about such uncertain matters, I focused all my attention in returning my body to normal.

And, the day Garam-ie finally found out more information about Moon Issak…

"There's someone named Lee Seol-hwa. Her class is tank-related, but she's somehow learned a [Top-grade Stealth] skill?" Garam-ie handed us a blurry picture of a User who had dark circles all the way down to her chin. "It's said that if they have the money, she'll protect anyone. She only accepts requests from the black market as well… Hm, but, no matter how much money she received from him, I don't think she'd be willing to make a deal with Moon Issak." [1]

"Why?"

"She went to prison five years ago because of him."

Perhaps Moon Issak caught her for misuse of skills?

Apparently she had protected the leader of a Russian organization who smuggled drugs, escorting that person all the way to the Philippines while avoiding the eyes of investigative agencies.

‘A member of an… *_organization_*.’

“She might have been intimidated,” Dawon said, opening up the possibility of this plausible turn of events.

“Where is she now?”

“According to the information, she belongs to the ‘Sun’ guild. It’s almost amusingly small, but, interestingly…”

Garam glanced at Koo Hui-seo before displaying a [Subcontract Agreement] before us. The contractor, surprisingly, was [Red Dragon], and the contractee was the [Sun] guild.

Naturally, everyone’s eyes turned towards Koo Hui-seo. However, the man didn’t panic; he merely lifted his eyebrows slightly, as if he had remembered something he had long forgotten. “Mmmm… This contract was made 15 years ago.”

Dawon-ie immediately asked, “Then, does that mean you weren’t involved?”

“Yes… But, I know the name of this Sun guild.”

“Do you even know what they do?”

Koo Hui-seo closed his mouth at those words, as if he were swallowing a sigh. Then, after organizing his thoughts, he continued calmly, “First things first, I have to explain the relationship between that guild and the Red Dragon back in those days… To summarize matters, as our guild grew in size…we changed the direction of our business.”

It was an open secret that, during its infancy, the [Red Dragon] guild grew in size from its illegal private loans.

Koo Hui-seo continued nonchalantly, “But… our guild, now a large company in the private loan business, couldn’t take their fingers out easily.”

Seo Dawon cut him off and said, “Did you divide the guild?”

Koo Hui-seo nodded, “Yeees… So, we created separate ‘affiliates’ or subsidiaries according to their business division. At that time, the guild’s name may have been different, but they were essentially the same as the main body.”

“So, the [Sun] guild was in charge of something.”

“If I remember correctly, it was smuggling drugs…”

‘Were they mafia?’ Since I had thought they were some petty loan shark company, Koo Hui-seo’s calm words felt eerie.

But, Koo Hui-seo remained calm.

“However… As we grew in scale, the public’s eyes focused on us… The sunny, legal dungeon business was more profitable than underworld ventures. So, in my father’s twilight years, we started to distance ourselves. I heard the [Sun] guild master moved his base abroad. Somewhere in the Philippines, I heard…”

Eventually, the connection between the Sun guild and the Red Dragon had long been severed. That’s why Koo Hui-seo had momentarily forgotten about them.

Koo Hui-seo also reiterated, “So, after they moved their base, they had nothing to do with us… I don’t even know who the master of that guild is anymore.”

I asked him, “Then, is there no way to contact them?”

“… It can be done, but I don’t know how cooperative they will be. Especially for me… Since I suddenly became the new guildmaster.”

However, Dawon-ie seemed to think differently, “Actually, it might go better since you’re not well known.”

“……”

“Contact them about starting up trade once more. If you say it’s a confidential request, they’ll come to their own conclusions.”

“If they don’t agree?”

“Then trace their location again. After all, Moon Issak is the one in a hurry–not us. I don’t know how he managed to escape from hypnosis, but if he’s back to normal, he would have returned to business as usual. He wouldn’t be wandering around looking for Lee-kyung.”

Koo Hui-seo nodded.

At that nod, the nanny, standing behind him, quietly retreated without even making a single footstep noise.

* * *

The next day, Koo Hui-seo informed us that he was able to make contact.

“They asked to meet at Busan’s port?”

“Yeees… I invited them here, but… Most of their guild members are wanted criminals, so they said it’d be challenging for them to come to a metropolitan area. Since Busan port is their base, they wanted to meet there… Should we go?”

Woo Ragi grimaced, “…What a nuisance.”

Olim-ie also felt uneasy, “Koo Hui-seo. Can’t we just dig up Lee Seol-hwa’s location? At this point, I think it’s risky to evacuate your well-equipped, fortress-like home and go down to Busan.”

In fact, it was all because of Koo Hui-seo’s financial resources and his home that we were able to train safely without being threatened by Bae

Jaemin or Moon Issak.

Koo Hui-seo was unexpectedly in control of the Red Dragon guild and had no problem mobilizing the guild's finances or members.

Especially the many protective spells that hung over this house… of course, Dawon-ie supplemented the barriers, but each magic effect was worth hundreds of millions and created a fortress akin to a grand castle.

Even if a war erupted, once could survive a siege in this house.

Additionally, peculiarly, Koo Hui-seo was directly in charge of this mansion's protection. As it was powered by Koo Hui-seo's 'cursed blood,' anyone who wanted to do something insidious in this mansion was inevitably cursed.

All employees working in this house had to abide by the taboos that he created; if they broke those taboos, they would die on the spot. That's how those that weren't susceptible to being bought remained in this mansion's workforce.

Thanks to that, we were able to avoid exposure. Bae Jaemin, to some extent, might be able to guess our location, but he wouldn't be able to search a guild master's home without evidence. This house naturally became our safest fortress.

Koo Hui-seo knew that well; he nodded, agreeing with her, "That's why I wanted to invite them up here in any way I could, but… Mm, they were quite wary of me. They said they had a deal with my father and not me… Well, in any case, they didn't trust me at all."

Looking at his oddly sour expression, it seems that the other party was quite aggressive.

We looked at each other.

No, rather, everyone looked at Seo Dawon before glancing at me. It seems that he and I were the ones that would need to make the final

decision.

Dawon-ie was silent, deep in contemplation. "……"

Choi Kyung-sik said, "Lee Seol-hwa is bound to be a key member of that guild. As a tanker, you can guard yourself…but a criminal specialized in security and stealth…You'd be wanted anywhere."

Garam also sighed, "Right. It was so hard to get this information, too. I had to turn the black market inside out to obtain it."

Eunji, who had been listening quietly, tilted her head and said, "Hmm… Would people like that willingly reveal information about Moon Issak? Perhaps they're in Busan with him right now."

"If he's there, then we have to go." Dawon replied. But somehow, his face showed great reluctance when he looked over at me. "It'd be dangerous to leave him alone. We need to check what he's up to."

"…Alright."

"I won't let you be in danger this time. I swear."

I smiled at Dawon-ie without saying anything. I had always trusted him, and there had never been a moment when that trust was betrayed. I couldn't put into words how much I believed in him, and there was no need for oaths.

And, I hoped Dawon-ie recognized that trust I had in him on his own, but…

'It must be hard.'

However, after killing Moon Issak properly this time, Seo Dawon might be able to retire his shame. So, I was actually rather looking forward to reuniting with Moon Issak.

—

Become a member!

TL: I appreciate hearing about Seo Dawon's insecurities compared to Lee-kyung's. The dynamic has shifted, ya'll.

Also, I'm ready for vs Moon Issak pt 2, electric boogaloo.

Footnotes

1. Once again, no way to know the gender at the moment, but Seol-hwa is a female name, usually.

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Chapter 368

Chapter 368

Usually, Users need to go through a number of complex hoops to leave the hub, but it was a different reality for those who have money. After waiting for about a day, we were able to leave for Busan Port immediately.

Disregarding the tension we felt, I felt refreshed when I saw the open road beyond the window reflected in Dawon's expectant eyes. After all, I had been inside for more than three weeks in the safety of Koo Hui-seo's mansion.

"……" I looked out the window and looked down at the wriggling Lackey in my arms. "Shall we open the window?"

[Clack Clack Clack?]

[No?]

I had merely asked since it looked uncomfortable, but the skeleton refused straight away. Then, it wriggled again, changing its posture. Perhaps all it wanted was to be in my arms.

Lackey, who finally peacefully settled down, looked at its open right hand–a ruby-embedded jewel ring snugly fit onto its middle finger had caught its attention.

This ring was given to me by Koo Hui-seo. On the evening before we left for Busan, the baby harassed Lackey so much that the skeleton eventually pushed him away. The push was gentle, so the baby wasn't hurt, but the rejection must have shocked him. The baby sobbed as if to protest the unfair treatment. And, despite Koo Hui-seo's efforts, the tears continued.

Worried that both the baby and Koo Hui-seo would become dehydrated at this rate, I tried to persuade Lackey to apologize to the baby. Koo Hui-seo put the baby to sleep, though; when he returned, he gave the ring to Lackey.

Fortunately, the skeleton seemed to like the ring very much. When morning came and we would soon depart, Lackey gracefully accepted the baby even if he sucked on the skeleton's skull or poked through the eye sockets with his fingers.

Since the skeleton had received the ring yesterday, and even until it left the very next morning, Lackey was kept busy looking at the ring…

"Do you like it that much?" I asked.

[Clack Clack?]

[What?]

However, whenever I touched Lackey, it quickly focused on me as if it never had been so entranced. That sight was just so adorable. I kissed the top of the skeleton's head and murmured, "So cute…"

[Clack clack clack].

[Hehe.]

At that moment, a low voice cut into our lovey-dovey atmosphere.

“Thanks.”

I looked up at the Mage who unabashedly stole the compliment–it seemed like he was dissatisfied when I placed my lips atop Lackey’s skull. How could he be so jealous of Lackey?

However, with a forewarning, Dawon-ie nibbled on my earlobe–lightly, so it wouldn’t hurt. It didn’t feel bad…I guess, you could say the sensation made me giggle.

“Aren’t you glad the other kids aren’t in the car?” Seo Dawon whispered softly into my ear when I giggled.

Heat rising in my face, I replied, “I’m sure you’re glad.”

Though my reply was quite blunt, I definitely agreed that I wouldn’t do this where the other Servants were buzzing about.

Actually, there was a reason why Seo Dawon, Lackey, and I were alone in the same car. That was because Kim Olim and Choi Kyung-sik insisted on dividing the team at our last meeting the evening before our departure.

Olim-ie was continuously anxious about me leaving the mansion–she agonized over it for hours silently…without speaking a word of her worries to anyone. Then, in the end, she came up with the idea of dispersing us between multiple cars with the focus on my protection.

However, most servants were skeptical of that route.

Garam was the first to express his discontent, “Tsk…What’s the point of that? We’re all just souls anyway. Whether or not we’re in cars…it’s all the same.”

Then, he looked at me and pouted, “And, if you divide us, Choi Lee-kyung will say he wants to go with Dawon-ie-hyung!”

Seo Dawon only raised his eyebrow slightly. I couldn’t really refute and dithered. As the atmosphere became a bit tense, Choi Kyung-sik stepped forward, “Mmm, Actually… We do have a security problem, but I finally created the [Prototype] dummy.”

Then, Choi Kyung-sik took out white dolls that looked like mannequins from his inventory.

Surprisingly, though the dolls had the same face, each one had different clothes and body types. So, as soon as I saw the dolls, I knew who was intended to operate which doll.

Garam-ie just disdainfully glanced at the shortest dummy.

“Hehe, Eunji’s figure… It’s one-to-one as well?” Eunji stood in front of her dummy, seemingly pleased.”

“Hey, but why is it so smooth here?” Woo Ragi crudely lifted the trousers on his dummy, looked inside, and asked.

Dawon clicked his tongue, “You’re originally small anyway, Ragi-yah.”

“I was twice your size, though?”

The two glared at each other through the air.

Just as this childish argument was about to start, Olim coolly said, “Are you really asking for him to attach genitals? I don’t know what you want to do with these dummies, but keep that within your imagination only.”

Upon hearing that, I noticed that Choi Kyung-sik was looking into the distance, likely trying to suppress a laugh.

Meanwhile, Garam protested to Choi Kyung-sik in a very dissatisfied manner, “Why is mine so small?!”

Bang Eunji reflexively blurted, “It’s the same size as Garam-kun, though?”

“Piss off!”

Choi Kyung-sik chuckled, shook his head, and looked at me when the others started quibbling. Perhaps he wanted me to calm these people down– I scratched my cheek and clapped once.

Clap–

Suddenly, all the servants focused on me. Choi Kyung-sik quickly continued now that we regained their attention, “Please take a good look at the dummies, and tell me if the size exceeds your margin of error. Alright?”

“It’s twenty centimeters shorter than my real height!” Garam-ie immediately protested, but Choi Kyung-sik didn’t even bother to answer.

Then, he shook his head a little bit with a regretful expression, “Honestly, I’m a little ashamed. I originally wanted to make a homunculus.”

Homunculi and Dummies were different alchemical types, and Homunculi were considered superior to Dummies. Choi Kyung-sik continued on to tell us why crafting the Homunculus failed, “In order to properly control the Homunculus, smart parts of our bodies or corpses need to be involved.”

“……”

“Flesh, blood, hair… Well, I couldn’t find any of those, so I eventually made a Dummy as a substitute. Mm, it’s not so bad, but…” He trailed off, as if he couldn’t hide the regret in his voice. He pointed to the fake bodies and continued, “Still, thanks to Koo Hui-seo-ssi the dummies are high-quality enough that people would be surprised to know that they’re dummies. You guys will realize that when you drive them yourselves.”

Choi Kyung-sik explained that the dummies could be considered a minimalistic golem as he handed each person a key-like gem.

Then, Choi Kyung-sik demonstratively effortlessly cranked the joint between the dummy's face and neck. In doing so, the spot where the jeweled key would be inserted–the cross-section–became visible.

"The initial installation will take some time. About 1 to 2 minutes after you insert the key."

Every servant, except Seo Dawon, placed their key in their Dummy.

'Come to think of it, Dawon-ie doesn't have one.'

I was a bit puzzled about that, but, since Dawon-ie didn't particularly react, the two must have talked about this matter in advance.

Meanwhile, the Dummies began to illuminate; the servant's appearances became hazy. The bent necks automatically returned to their proper positions…like a robot…?

"Huh?" I muttered.

Though the bodies' faces were initially unremarkable, as the Servants vanished, distinct facial features started to emerge. Subsequently, their bodies and faces matched, forming a coherent visage. Even the blinking eyes made it seem as if the bodies were truly alive.

Of course, upon closer inspection, each body part was clearly segmented, and the body felt distinctly non-human. Especially if the Dummy were to be placed among humans, the disparity might become more apparent.

Nonetheless, they were amazing. I approached them slowly.

Woo Ragi was the first to raise his head, "This isn't too bad, huh."

When he flicked his finger, the assemblage of the joints were inhuman, but the movements felt very human.

“…So annoying.” Jung Garam punched in rapid succession before setting his hand down, muttering indignantly. It seemed like he was still upset, but he had no complaints about the body’s performance.

“It’s a lot heavier than Eunji?” Eunji, who gracefully twirled like a ballerina, lowered her raised heel.

Choi Kyung-sik, who was making similar movements as he stretched, replied, “It’ll be a bit heavier. They’re mostly made out of metal.”

—-

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a member!

TL: Also, Oh my god…the conversation about the dummy genitalia…

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Chapter 369

Chapter 369

Garam-ie leapt high in place. “You definitely have to expend more energy than usual… It’s small and heavy–fucking hate it.”

Kyung-ie ignored Garam-ie’s grumbling.

On the other hand, Olim-ie laughed with her teeth on full display. “The increase in weight is great. [Dash]’s destructive power will go up.”

As she spoke, she summoned her shield. There was tremendous power behind even the simple action of raising the shield.

Woo Ragi smirked, “Very fun.”

“This gun blade…It feels like a foam rod made of sorghum stalks.” Eunji also seemed happy to take advantage of the change brought about by her change in weight. It felt a bit like forgoing some speed and gaining some power in return.

And, as everyone adjusted to the Dummy bodies, a system message popped up before my eyes.

[Your comprehension of the scenario has slightly improved].

[Your level has increased!]

[You've invented an interesting tool. The idea of putting resentful souls into Dummies–like 'puppets'–is excellent. It seems like you can plunge this world into terrible destruction and chaos. Why don't you showcase more of your talents?]

[Your servant, Choi Kyung-sik, who implemented this idea will be given a new title.]

[Servant 'Choi Kyung-sik' has won the title, 'Puppet Alchemist.']

[Your servant, Seo Dawon, who designed this idea will be given a new title.]

[Servant 'Seo Dawon' has won the title 'Seeker of Specters.'] [1]

[The User 'Choi Lee-kyung' has acquired a special skill called 'Halloween Party' which allows him to bind and allow his resentful ghosts to dwell within all humanoid items.]

[A hidden scenario–Over the World–has opened!]

['Over the World' is a sub-scenario that will not interfere with the main scenario 'Revenge,' but in case the main scenario fails, this sub-scenario can proceed as an independent scenario. (※If special conditions are met.)]

I opened my eyes wide, startled by the unexpected spec upgrades. Simultaneously, the Servants fell quiet as they received alerts for the titles and skills.

"This…" Choi Kyung-sik had an unreadable expression. Kim Olim grimaced before staring at Seo Dawon, standing next to me.

Dawon-ie grabbed me by the shoulders and quickly scanned the system message. “…I expected this to some extent,” he said calmly.

“What?”

“For ‘us’ to ride and operate the [Dummies]… This hasn’t been done before, right?”

That was true. Perhaps it was arrogant of me to say, but I thought I was currently the most advanced Necromancer in the world.

In other words, summoning souls into the [Dummies] and merging them was something only I could do at the moment. Even if someone were to create an excellent [Dummy], there was no one else who had a Servant who could ‘board’ the vessel.

In the hub, attempting and succeeding in anything for the first time earned a significant amount of scenario points–not to mention substantial rewards. Users weren’t risking their lives to ‘first clear’ a dungeon without reason. However cases like mine, where I acquired both titles and skills, were extremely rare.

‘It’s good to see rewards, but…’

However, when Seo Dawon scanned the message expressionlessly and without exuberant confidence, I felt uneasy.

“Is it…dangerous, by any chance?” I asked, looking up at the silent Mage.

Seo Dawon glanced at my expression before relaxing his face a little. He softly explained, “There are two cases in which a high reward may be offered. Either you’ve accomplished something incredibly difficult, or you’ve stumbled upon a huge scenario.”

“It’s both. Actually, Kyung-sik-ie had a lot of struggles while completing the [Dummy]. Though I drew the blueprint, any alchemist not on Kyung-sik-ie’s level would have a high chance of failing.”

“I actually even managed to complete Choi Lee-kyung’s balance potions simultaneously as well,” Choi Kyung-sik quickly chimed in and highlighted his ability.

Dawon nodded softly, without any hint of disdain, “That’s right. It would have been impossible without you.”

“Hoohoo~”

“And, assuming we succeed, it’d be like we’re constantly summoned. It’s a big boost.”

The ability to act, even as a [Dummy], without the need for me to call out their name was a great advantage.

In addition, the original [Dummy] was nothing more than a puppet for an alchemist to control. Now, any soul with the ‘key’ could use the puppet without the alchemist’s interference.

“Then… What is this chilling part of the system message?” I asked Seo Dawon, pointing at the words, [It seems like you can plunge this world into terrible destruction and chaos]. Before long, the other servants approached me, looked at my status window, and fell silent. They, too, were immersed in their thoughts.

After a few seconds of silence, Seo Dawon replied, “The words ‘destruction and chaos’ are surprisingly frequent in scenario messages.”

“Really?”

“Destroying the existing order means that we have found a new truth while performing certain actions to defy existing laws. Though it may sound extreme, it’s still positive.”

“…Somehow, I can’t believe that.”

“And we’re the dead.”

“…Yeah.”

“For the living, it would be quite bewildering to see us move around like a living person by using the [Dummy].”

It wasn’t that I couldn’t understand now that everything had been explained, but it bothered me when the system message said [Why don’t you showcase more of your talents?], as if I was missing some other use of this [Dummy].

“Is this alright? I’m also a bit bothered by the added scenario.”

“You want to see it together?”

“Sure.” Making it so everyone could see, I pressed the shining [Scenario] message.

[Over the World

Scenario Description:

-Do you know about the world ‘before’?

-Before the beginning of this world, there was a brilliant civilization. Soon, they used their capabilities to make ‘….’

-Aha, I see you’re already startled. They used ‘….’ to transcend dimensions, surpassing into the realm of gods, and became gods themselves.

-An almost perfect world was formed!

-The game of cat and mouse with death had almost finished.

-However, these people who have dominated all dimensions were eventually robbed of everything by their creations.

.

.

.

-And perhaps, you might be able to recreate this ‘Golden Age,’ when alchemy flourished. What you’ve created is quite similar to what alchemists of the Golden Age made with ‘….’—of course, it’s far inferior now.

-So, why don’t you look for remaining records of this ‘previous world’?

-Perhaps you too…

-…Might be able to reach the realm of the Gods.

Current Scenario Progress: 5%

Reward: A completed ‘….’ blueprint]

The scenario’s content was remarkably intriguing. The fact that the newly created, rideable [Dummies] were similar to ancient relics was quite interesting–perhaps the mechanisms were similar.

“This all seems incredible…” I said in a quivering voice.

But, the servants around me seemed unimpressed.

“Choi Lee-kyung, you’re a bit clumsy, so this is probably the first time you’ve seen a scenario like this.”

“Huh?”

“Most of them are written like **that.**”

Though I became momentarily incensed when Garam-ie called me clumsy, I cooled down, remembering how I had chosen the Necromancer class through the system's vague, sweet-nothings. Suddenly, the reward didn't seem as amazing as it had first appeared.

However, Choi Kyung-sik thoroughly scanned through the scenario several times. "This–the reward is definitely something suited for Alchemists, right?"

"Probably. Why, feeling greedy?"

"If I wasn't feeling greedy, would I be a ranker?" Choi Kyungsik said, confidently, before looking directly at me. "I'll help you with this scenario, so will you support me?"

"I-I want to, but… What can I do?"

"From now on we should investigate anything related to this 'previous world'–items, dungeons, books… even tabloids. Everything. You'll cooperate, right?"

"……" I didn't want to answer, but I couldn't help but nod when I saw Choi Kyung-sik's bright eyes. "Alright…"

"Huhuhu~ I'm growing stronger for your benefit, Choi Lee-kyung-ssi."

"It might be harder than it seems." Dawon-ie read the scenario carefully as well.

Choi Kyung-sik's smile disappeared from his excited face.

Dawon continued without hesitating, "The scenario reward is, no doubt, for an Alchemist… But I feel like this quest will connect to another–like a dungeon."

"No way…"

"Yeah. After the [Tower of Command], there's been no rumors of a new scenario appearing, right?"

At those words, all our eyes opened wide. Don't tell me–was this the start of an advanced scenario linked to the next dungeon?

Even Garam-ie's eyes were sparking. If our hypothesis was true, and this led to the next dungeon…This was the equivalent of winning a lottery ten times!

Just then, Kim Olim frowned, "Seo Dawon. We don't have the leisure to cling to a scenario."

"Really?"

"You know that's true. Bae Jaemin, Lim Jisoo, and Moon Issak as well… We'll need to take care of those problems before uncovering the scenario."

As Olim had said, there was already a mountain we had to overcome before we could even think about the scenario.

"However," Seo Dawon smiled and said, "No. If we are to maintain the upper hand, we have no choice but to get ahead of them."

"……"

"If there's a way to grow faster beyond monopolizing undiscovered and undisclosed dungeons, I'll listen to your opinion."

Thus, we decided to try and find a way to proceed with the scenario, 'Over the World,' as soon as we returned from Busan Port.

—

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a member!

TL: First: I’m so not ready for Necromancer Survival to go meta on me >.< I’m going to need to brush up on my vocabulary.

Second: Previous world? Alternate universe? Who knows?

Third: The way to find these new scenarios are so freaking esoteric–I hope the system is proud of itself.

Footnotes

1. (Seeker) is often used in the context of someone seeking religious enlightenment.

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Chapter 370

Necromancer 370

As we headed to Busan Port, we decided to operate the [Dummies] to provide feedback on their weaknesses and movements.

And, crucially, we eventually split into different cars based on the number of people, and I, thanks to Seo Dawon's strong insistence, rode with the Mage. Honestly, I had wanted to see these [Dummies] up close. It looked fascinating, and I wanted to observe how the servants moved.

But…

'He doesn't even need to say anything… Something is shady.'

Therefore, I decided to let Dawon-ie do as he pleased. I'm sure he wasn't hiding anything, but there probably was some good reason for him to insist on being left alone with me.

However, Dawon-ie kept leaning on my body, patting me all over on our way to Busan Port. Now that I thought about it, Seo Dawon might have just wanted to be with me without any interference from the other servants.

In any case, I started to relax–something I hadn't felt for a long while–as Seo Dawon stroked my head. Suddenly, a stray thought popped into my head, and I asked, "You know, I'm curious about something."

"What are you curious about?"

"Why don't you have a Dummy?"

Dawon’s eyes opened wide, as if he didn’t expect me to ask this question. However, he awkwardly smiled, and replied obediently, “That ugly doll… I don’t really want to operate it.”

“What??”

“~Secret~.”

I eventually couldn’t help but laugh–I was reminded of Jung Garam’s grumbling face. Dawon-ie laughed along with me.

Meanwhile, a bridge came into view, piercing through the cloudless, blue sky. Then, we could see the sea looming beyond the bridge.

* * *

Because our car departed first, I couldn’t see the [Dummies] in action. However, my eyes grew bigger as I watched the servants step out of the sedans that arrived, one after the other.

This time, we were disguised as Koo Hui-seo’s bodyguard, so we wore black suits. However, I was still startled to see the servants’ formal dress in their [Dummies]. At first glance, they looked like humans…

‘What happened? They look like real people…’

There wasn’t a hint of unnaturalness.

Everyone was elegantly dressed in tailored suits with black gloves, sunglasses, and earpieces–their aura was definitely different. Even though they wore masks that covered much of their faces, they absolutely did not look like dolls. It was like night and day compared to when the dummies were first activated.

“They added a bit more ‘color’ to the dummies–some post-processing.” Dawon-ie whispered in my ear.

I nodded slightly and tried not to stare at the servants, as much as possible. From the moment we stepped out of the car, we entered the area controlled by the [Sun] guild, and there were many watchful eyes.

Rustle–

Finally, Koo Hui-seo unboarded last. Koo Hui-seo had dismounted in the arms of a buff man while surrounded by the other bodyguards. Soon, a wheelchair appeared.

‘He seemed to be able to walk around on his own in the mansion…’

I was a little worried that his health had suddenly deteriorated, but Koo Hui-seo passed me by without glancing at me.

Whoosh–

When Koo Hui-seo appeared, the space around us warped and distorted. Simultaneously, burly men popped out from behind the container boxes that filled the docks.

I was taken aback since I was unaware of the presence until just now, but a cold hand held mine, as if to calm me down. Therefore, I was able to peacefully and silently lower my eyes.

“You must have suffered by coming such a long way–thank you for indulging in our rude request.”

"……"

Just then, a bald man with a full beard walked before us, grinning widely. He was at least as big as Kim Sangyoon rugged tattoos adorned his tanned skin.

I couldn't take my eyes off the tattoos that extended sharply up to the man's jawline. It wasn't until I heard Jung Garam's voice through our earphones that I snapped back to reality.

[That's the Sun guild's guild master: Sung Yi-hwan.]

"It couldn't be helped…" Simultaneously, Koo Hui-seo responded to Sung Yi-hwan's apology.

Even though I couldn't see Koo Hui-seo's face because his back was turned towards me… The volume and the creeping, trembling tone… Compared to Sung Yi-hwan, Koo Hui-seo felt too fragile.

The guild master, Sung Yi-hwan, seemed to share similar thoughts, and the tension that permeated his expression began to loosen as he looked down at Koo Hui-seo, arms crossed over his chest.. A fleeting smirk passed over the burly man's face.

Without bothering to hide his expression, Sung Yi-hwan exaggeratedly bowed his head; the corners of his lips curled up. "Thank you for your understanding. Then, let me guide you inside."

With that said, Sung Yi-hwan walked ahead, but Koo Hui-seo's wheelchair didn't move. Just before Sung Yi-hwan turned back again, Koo Hui-seo nodded subtly, and the man pushing the wheelchair began to walk.

And, we followed quietly.

* * *

[We were incredibly surprised to hear that you wanted to initiate trade once more.]

[While searching for distribution networks…]

While listening to Koo Hui-seo and Sung Yi-hwan talking through the ear jacks, the Servants and I positioned ourselves around the building like we were truly bodyguards.

The members of the [Sun] guild continued to monitor us, as if to keep us in check. However, our aim was to find Lee Seolhwa's whereabouts, so we feel too much unnecessary tension from them and their actions.

[I'm starting 'Chaser.']

At that time, Bang Eunji's long awaited voice filtered through to my ears.

We were scattered around the exterior of the building, but thanks to the special devices we had installed on the dummies, we could share our perspectives. Of course, I couldn't see, but the servants could share their views with each other, allowing us to quickly locate any suspicious areas.

[Can you see the blue building at 7 o'clock? I think Lee Seolhwa is over there.]

Perhaps my nerves were to blame, but my palms were slightly clammy. Now, at the right time, we had to pull ourselves out from this situation, and find Moon Issak and Lee Seolhwa’s whereabouts.

Just then–

There was a sudden loud noise from where Koo Hui-seo should be.

[…Why don’t you slowly start being honest now?]

And, I heard Sung Yi-hwan’s ominous voice.

Following that, faint gasps–Koo Hui-seo?–reached our ears. Dawon and I simultaneously exchanged glances. However, before we could come to any decision, a deafening boom emanated from within the building.

Crash–!

“Get him!”

The explosion was like a signal–the members of the [sun] guild that had been keeping watch over us suddenly began to run. A man with a massive axe charged toward me, and, following the training I received, I swiftly rolled on the ground to evade the first attack.

“Die!!!”

However, my opponent was a User who worked for a drug peddling gang. He followed my movements skillfully, and, when I tried to stand up, I slightly twisted my wrist. However, I didn’t panic and summoned my first Servant, Lackey. “[Lackey]!”

[Clack Clack!!!]

As soon as it was summoned, Lackey intercepted the incoming axe with its jaw. Then, power surging through its body, the skeleton immediately swelled. It had changed into [Skeleton Soldier] mode.

“W-What is that!” The man seemed bewildered when the baby-sized skeleton suddenly transformed into something 160 cm tall. He eventually lost his balance, stumbled, and was disarmed. Immediately, Lackey threw away the axe, rushed in, and tore into the man’s neck.

“Gaahhhaghh!”

I took my eyes off my former attacker and turned towards Seo Dawon, who was watching me in return. The golden magic circles spinning behind the Mage’s hands, slowly faded as our gazes met.

“I’m alright. Let’s go,” I said.

“…Okay.” Dawon-ie held my outstretched hand before looking behind us momentarily. At the same time, Lackey spat out the man’s broken neck and followed us closely.

“Everyone’s listening, right? First, leave this place to us and secure Lee Seolhwa.” I grabbed my earjack, which had fallen out in the scuffle, and spoke into it.

[Got it. Stay out of sight and be careful.]

[We’re already on our way!]

[Just in case, try to stay as quiet as possible.]

A few servants answered immediately, and others didn't answer at all. However, I wasn't too worried–I was more concerned about Koo Hui-seo at the moment. By my rough estimate, Sung Yi-hwan didn't appear to be an easy opponent.

"Koo Hui-seo-ssi! Can you hear me? Are you alright?" I spoke through the security channels, but I heard no reply.

Boom–!

With Lackey leading the charge, we broke through the building's front door. When I entered, I immediately saw Sung Yi-hwan holding and lifting Koo Hui-seo by the neck.

TL: I'm so proud of Lackey, ya'll.

Also I'm going on a break since it's my final's period. (Actually, that started last Wednesday, but I had enough stockpile for today). As it stands, I'll have to skip Friday's upload T_T

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“Oho~ So, you’re the rat that Issak-ie was talking about?” Sung Yi-hwan turned his head slightly and glared at me over his shoulder. Issak-ie… Is he talking about Moon Issak?

“[Seo Dawon].”

At my instinctive call, Seo Dawon cast a shadow on me with his now corporeal body.

However, Sung Yi-hwan wasn’t flustered at all. Rather, he looked back at us, chuckling. “Wow… I half didn’t believe him, you know.” However, unlike before, his left eye was shining white. Inside those white eyes, I could see the number 2 emblazoned within.

As soon as Seo Dawon was summoned, the Mage opened his inventory and took out his staff–it meant that the opponent was strong enough for him to use his weapon immediately.

Sung Yi-hwan, reading the flow of our tense atmosphere, grinned and said, “Hehehe. I see that you’ve noticed I received a [Baptism]. Seo Dawon… I wondered what kind of person you were before you died.”

“……”

“Perhaps my expectations were too high? You’re now so… boring!” As he shouted, the number inscribed in Sung Yi-hwan’s eyes changed. After

the number 7 appeared, he callously threw down the unconscious Koo Hui-seo and took a deep breath.

“[Vanguard].” Sung Yi-hwan’s body began to change. Thick fur poked up over the tattoos that covered his body; long, yellow fangs began to appear from his upper lip.

When I saw Sung Yi-hwan standing on all fours, as if he were about to fall over, my hands shook nervously. His yellow eyes filled with bloodthirst, and he quickly became twice Dawon’s size.

“A werewolf…”

[Clack Clack!]

[He’s gonna kill you!]

However, Dawon-ie didn’t back down; Lackey bravely stepped forward as well. And…

[Growwwwl….]

The man with the broken neck had become a zombie–though I don’t know when that had happened–and stood behind the skeleton.

I almost jumped in alarm when the man appeared, but the zombie merely whimpered as it passed by me before lingering around Lackey. Looking at his face a little closer, I realized he was the man that Lackey had bitten and killed earlier.

‘I don’t think he’d be very helpful, but…’

Still, when I saw the purpled and crooked-necked zombie, I felt a little less scared of the werewolf.

[Where are the other Red Lotus members?]

Sung Yi-hwan wasn't surprised, as if he had expected all this, and merely pawed at the floor with his front feet.

Dawon-ie didn't answer and pushed his staff forward. Simultaneously, densely overlaid, golden magic circles blocked the space between us and Sung Yi-hwan. Instantly, his huge body was covered.

In that window of opportunity, I ran forward and pulled at Seo Dawon's arm. And, when the Mage looked back at me, I kissed him on the cheek.

[The buff 'Deadly Kiss' has been applied to 'Seo Dawon.']

"… This is a bit embarrassing. Haha." As soon as I received the system message that the buff had been applied, I fanned my flaming face.

Dawon-ie smiled without saying anything about it. "Next time…"

"Hm?"

"Add a little more self-interest and sincerity into it." Then, after staring at my lips for a while, he completely turned his back. At the same time, the shining light emanating from the magic circles became so bright that I couldn't open my eyes.

* * *

"…It's strange." Jung Garam, following behind Bang Eunji, muttered as he leapt over the wall. Lee Seolhwa's location, which had been clearly discernible until just a while ago, disappeared as soon as they crossed the

mansion’s threshold. Of course, even if this was a trap to lure them here, he was confident in breaking through, but…

“Hey, Otaku. Can you feel anything?” He shouted.

How should he put it…. From the moment he entered this space, he felt something inherently strange.

Jung Garam had shouted to Bang Eunji when they passed by a garden that had no scent. However, when Bang Eunji looked back, her brows were furrowed in anger, “……”

“What?”

“Why did you call Eunji with such a derogatory nickname just now?”

“You’re an Otaku, aren’t you?”

“Then, I’ll call you Dwarf-ram-ssi.”

“Hah?”

“Dwarf Jung Garam-ssi.”

“You really…” Even as his anger surged, Jung Garam knew that he had no time to quarrel with Bang Eunji. So, he swallowed his irritation, stared at her, and said, “Bang. Eun. Ji. Are you finished? I asked if you felt anything when you entered the garden. Quickly–tell me.”

As expected, Bang Eunji answered without further ado, “Hm. Eunji can’t be sure. But it somehow feels like divine power is getting stronger in this mansion.”

“…Yeah, for sure. We might not be able to step in if we weren’t in Dummy mode.”

At the same time, Jung Garam and Bang Eunji simultaneously glanced at the statue of the Holy Mother on the roof of the mansion.

“It’s that, right? The ‘sacred thing,’ I mean.”

“Probably. I feel bad just looking at it.”

“Why not use your bazooka?”

“Should I?” Following Jung Garam’s words, Bang Eunji lifted her [Gunblade]. “[Bazookapo], activate!”

Then, [Gunblade]’s appearance transformed into a bazooka gun, with a greatly expanded barrel width. The length had also extended to twice that of its previous appearance.

And, Click– Bang Eunji unlocked the locking mechanism and raised her Bazooka gun over her shoulder.

Jung Garam, looking at Bang Eunji, asked a bit dubiously, “Will that even work? It looks like you’re going to demolish your shoulder.”

“I think the Dummy’s durability will be fine, though? Even if it’s not, we’ll have to try it out sooner or later.”

“……”

Eventually, Bang Eunji stubbornly lit her cannon and her round flew towards the Holy Mother statue with a loud ‘bang!’

Bang Eunji’s body recoiled slightly as she shot the gun, but the [Dummy] remained intact–only a slightly burnt smell and a scratch were left behind.

“Wow, it’s not bad?” Jung Garam whistled.

“But.. The attack didn’t work.”

Jung Garam looked up again when Bang Eunji finished speaking; the gunslinger hadn’t taken her eyes off the statue. The holy statue maintained its neat appearance, as if nothing had happened.

“Nngh… Ah–did it not reach?”

“Ara? Jung Garam-kun. Didn’t that Goddess statue move?”

“What?” Jung Garam looked again at her words.

Then, he noticed that the Goddess Statue’s expression had changed subtly. Her gentle smile had slightly distorted. Gradually the statue shifted until it glared down at Jung Garam and Bang Eunji, who attacked her.

Jung Garam took out his weapon. “Hey, That Goddess Statue looks pretty damn mad.”

“What an arrogant figurine.”

As soon as Bang Eunji finished speaking, the fierce-looking statue appeared in front of the two attackers.

* * *

“Argh! They shouldn’t have touched that!” Choi Kyung-sik covered his face with his hands and sat down. Kim Olim and Woo Ragi also began to lament when they saw the Bazookapo hit the Holy Mother statue.

“They’re just smashing things without thinking,” Woo Ragi mumbled, frustrated.

Choi Kyung-sik asked, “…As expected, I should have gone with them, huh?”

Kim Olim shook her head, “No, well… If we have to find a silver lining, perhaps it isn’t bad for their attention to be drawn that way. They’ll be able to hold on for about 20 minutes.”

“…Haah. I’ll try to be quick about it.” Choi Kyung-sik, despite looking dismayed, pressed his hand to his abdomen, summoning a magic circle across the surface of his body.

Then, like a toy block, Choi Kyung-sik’s right arm detached abruptly. He placed the arm on the ground and opened his inventory, taking out a flask filled with red liquid. He began pouring the liquid onto the fallen arm.

“It’s moving.”

“We didn’t get caught, right?”

“Yeah.”

Woo Ragi continued to be wary of his surroundings even after confirming that the Holy Mother Statue had gone towards Jung Garam and Bang Eunji. He looked closely at the remaining Goddess Statues, which weren’t moving.

It was then.

Buzz–

The red liquid from the fallen arm of Choi Kyung-sik was completely absorbed, and a strange resonance began to occur. As a result, the arm gradually was pushed into the ground.

“Alright. Let’s move on.”

As soon as Choi Kyung-sik finished speaking, the ground where his arm was swallowed began to turn a dull black.

However soon, an unusual light burst out from Jung Garam and Bang Eunji’s location. Moreover, the light was strong enough to be felt by the three folks on this side.

“Tsk, not good…” Kim Olim bit her lips as she looked over there.

Woo Ragi stopped leaning against a tree, “I’ll go check it out.”

___

TL: I cannot–something is just so hilarious about the mental image of Choi Kyung-sik, Kim Olim, and Woo Ragi standing by and saying “THOSE FUCKING IDIOTS.”

Also, the po in Bazookapo is, I’m pretty sure, just a cutesy way to portmanteau “cannon” onto the end of Bazooka. However, I thought it’d fit Eunji better (aka her style of speaking) to leave the ‘po’ untranslated. I could be wrong–that could be a reference to something else.

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The Holy Mother Statue's expression was downright eerie. Her benevolent smile vanished without a trace; her eyelids opened to reveal blood-red eyes. She blocked the way in front of Jung Garam and Bang Eunji.

The fingertips–the nails–resembled the forelegs of some beast. However, Bang Eunji aimed at the statue with the [Gunblade] in her arms without changing her complexion. "[Hyper Magic]!"

Boom Boom Boom–!

As soon as the skill activated, the [Gunblade] fired a shot with a roar. Purple spheres formed, following their own orbits, rushed at the statue at irregular intervals.

[Grrrrrrr….]

However, the Goddess Statue spat out dark liquid and avoided Bang Eunji's skill at a speed that made her invisible to the nakedeye. Almost simultaneously, bulging blue veins began to rise on the statue's marble skin.

"[Dark Assault]." At that moment, Jung Garam infiltrated the statue's blindspot and rushed at her bosom. Although the dagger hit her side, the

black flesh was only slightly revealed, as if some sand had been shaved off. The damage was minimal.

Jung Garam narrowly escaped the nails that were trying to grab his neck.

“Is she like a brownie cookie?” Bang Eunji said, when she saw the black flesh exposed underneath.

“What are you even saying? Focus.” Jung Garam pouted and changed to a reverse grip on his dagger. “I guess that thing can recover as well?”

As Jung Garam said, the Holy Mother statue’s side was restored to white again, as if there had never been any damage. Bang Eunji placed the [Gunblade] on her shoulder again.

The Holy Mother statue immediately approached the gunslinger–a clear move to keep her strong attack in check.

“Where ya going?”

However, Jung Garam immediately blocked the statue’s way. Jung Garam swiftly slashed with the daggers in each hand, targeting the statue’s nose, lips, and neckline. Although the wounds quickly healed, during the moment the Goddess statue’s vision was obstructed, Bang Eunji’s skill activated.

“[Bazookapo]!”

The Holy Mother Statue, shot from point blank, was pushed back with a loud bang! Despite its charred appearance, the statue began to move again. Immediately, her skin began to recover.

When his special intuition, befitting a Hunter, pinged, Jung Garam spoke to Bang Eunji, “Hey–this is a trap. I think it has infinite recovery; we’ll need to uncover the conditions under which it operates.”

“Wait. [Chaser]!”

When Bang Eunji’s eyes began to shine, the Holy Mother ignored Jung Garam and continued to chase Eunji frantically. Because search and exploration skills had an increased margin of error when the User was moving, it was hard to derive accurate results. Therefore, Bang Eunji had to move half-heartedly.

“This is crazy!” Jung Garam drove his daggers into both of the Holy Mother’s back wings. And, the moment he was about to cut off her head–

[Graggghhhhh!]

The statue’s head turned 180 degrees; suddenly, she began to eject black liquid towards Jung Garam’s face.

The liquid wasn’t simply just liquid, of course. As the [Dummy] began to generate smoke, Jung Garam realized what the sticky black liquid was. “Is this thing fucking crazy? It’s spewing sulfuric acid.”

Of course, because this wasn’t a real body, there wasn’t a huge problem nor did it feel painful, but the [Dummy]’s functionality was slowly deteriorating.

However, Jung Garam didn’t fall from the Holy Mother Statue’s shoulders and instead exerted stronger force into his daggers. Then, with pure, brute force, he sliced through the statue from the wing roots all the way up to the shoulders.

“I found it!” At that moment, Bang Eunji found the ‘exit’ to this space. As if she were flying, she leaped and landed in front of Jung Garam, stepping on the fallen statue’s face.

Her heels, heavier than before, very casually crushed the statue’s head. The Holy Mother, who struggled even after both arms were cut off, dispersed into black sand when her head was completely crushed.

Only then did Jung Garam pour a cleaning potion over the [Dummy]’s head. Fortunately, the core circuit engraved under the skin wasn’t exposed, so his vision returned to normal.

After observing her guildmate, Bang Eunji pointed in a direction and said, “You can escape by going through those two trees. Eunji detected some movements over there.”

“There’s some other bastards there?”

“Yes. About five?”

“Fine. Let’s go immediately.”

So, they stood tall and tried to escape, but…

Thump– Thump–

Before they knew it, two Holy Mother statues fell from the air and glared at them.

* * *

[Kehehe, I’m overflowing with power.]

Now fully transformed into a wolf, Sung Yi-hwan, with his yellow eyes flashing, lowered his body. Then, he began to dash at Dawon-ie with a speed my eyes couldn’t catch.

[Awoooo–!]

As he barked, he jumped to the ceiling; he opened his mouth wide, as if he were about to bit the Mage. Though his movements were simple, his speed was alarming.

“[Demonist].” However, just before those yellowed, sharp fangs could touch him, a black circle appeared where Dawon-ie once stood. Golden magic circles began to fill that space. Then, a dark devil’s arm popped out before holding onto Sung Yi-hwan.

The outstretched arms twisted Sung Yi-hwan as if he were some laundry. I opened my eyes wide when I saw his neck was instantaneously broken.

‘Is that the end?’

[Kekekekek… You must have known that Werewolves are highly resistant to magic.]

However, Sung Yi-hwan continued to calmly speak even with a broken neck. Rather, he didn’t seem to be hurt at all, and he didn’t lose his momentum.

Sung Yi-hwan grinned, baring his teeth, and raised his head high.

[Awwoooooo—.]

He was howling.

Simultaneously, the summoning circle that Dawon-ie had manifested began to make static noises. The magic circle, which had been rotating round and round in interlocked orbits, was abruptly stopped.

Zzzzt–!

An ominous sound echoed.

My eyes opened wide as I watched the golden magic circle began to collapse. Soon after, the magic circle completely shattered. The once softly glowing, golden magic circle lost its light in an instant and went dark. The demonic arms vanished as well.

As if he were flaunting, Sung Yi-hwan somersaulted in the air before cracking his neck in a few different directions.

[You really did know about a werewolf’s high magic resistance.]

“……”

[If you foolishly threw a fireball at me, I was going to immediately tear apart that pretty face of yours.]

I was lost in thought as I listened to Sung Yi-hwan. ‘Is he saying that he has immunity to most ordinary magic skills?’

In other words, Dawon-ie, as a Mage, was countered by him. I anxiously looked at the Mage, but I couldn’t read his expression. However, he seemed a bit lost in thought as well.

‘First… I should see if there’s something I can do.’

I reached out my hand towards Sung Yi-hwan. The werewolf, in turn, must have noticed my movement as he growled and turned towards me.

“[Dead Mark]!” I had worked the hardest on this skill during training. However, the [Dead Mark] symbol, which appeared above Sung Yi-hwan’s head, suddenly melted away.

[The target’s magic resistance was too high–skill activation has been canceled.]

Sung Yi-hwan laughed at me, baring his yellow teeth.

[I suppose that one’s less intelligent than his servant.]

Then, he lowered himself again, as if he were about to take off. Then, as expected, he leapt incredibly high in the air before shouting at me, “In the time you used your magic… it would have been best for you to run away. Right, Necromancer?”

[Clack Clack!]

[Come at me!]

At that moment, Lackey stepped in between me and Sung Yi-hwan. However, I wasn’t the target–Seo Dawon was the target.

[Shield Break!]

He skillfully turned in the air and smacked Dawon’s shield with his gargantuan forefoot.

The shield, faintly sparkling as if it weren’t fully there, momentarily flickered as it blocked Sung Yi-hwan’s darkened claws. However, the entire shield seemed to have taken a significant impact, as a wave-like shimmer rippled from the impact site.

Creeaak–!

Meanwhile, Sung Yi-hwan raised his other hand and struck down at the shield again. The precarious balance was finally broken, and in the midst of the sparkling, glass-shard-like light, Dawon was left defenseless. My eyes were wide open; I was unable to scream.

Become a member!

TL: My god, the babies need help. Someone save Jung Garam and Bang Eunji from their horrible decisions. Also, translating combat scenes is hard T_T

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Clunk–!

Fortunately, the claws were blocked by another opaque barrier that appeared right in front of our noses. As if he were annoyed, Sung Yi-hwan grumbled–

[You’re truly wrapping up like an onion, aren’t you? Seo Dawon.]

“……”

[I wanted to see a bit of your precious flesh.]

As his shining eyes glanced over the Mage, I felt as if my blood rushed in reverse. I clenched my teeth and shouted to Lackey, “Support Dawon-ie.”

[Clack Clack..!]

[Okay…!]

Just as Lackey’s eyes twinkled purple, the zombie, reeling about behind us, rushed in at a high speed.

Sung Yi-hwan sneered mockingly as he brandished his right arm vigorously–

[Ravage.]

The air seemed to roar; a black wind–or something similar–quickly tumbled towards Lackey and the zombie.

[Graaagh!]

Though Lackey quickly avoided the attack, the zombie's reaction rate couldn't keep up, and it was exposed to the black wind.

The zombie's skin crackled; the smell of rotten blood permeated the air. I stepped back, covering my nose with my sleeve. In the end, the man-turned-zombie collapsed on the spot. However, Lackey continued to bravely step forward.

Clang–!

The rapidly running Lackey swung its sword at Sung Yi-hwan. However, rather than being cleaved in two, I heard the sound of iron colliding against iron.

Even though Lackey had only managed to strike once, the sword's blade had broken off. Though the quality was exceptional, the weapon had decent durability, and this unexpected event heightened my tension.

Sung Yi-hwan guffawed and said–

[Magic or Sword… Neither can even tickle this body.]

"……"

[I'll make you feel the difference in power between us.]

With that said, Sung Yi-hwan inhaled deeply–enough to swell his chest.

At that moment, Dawon-ie looked back at me before flicking his finger. Whoosh–! It felt like I was instantly wearing some noise-cancelling headphones.

[——!!!!]

Simultaneously, a vibrating sensation that made my whole body tingle burst forth from Sung Yi-hwan. Lackey, holding his sword handle, came to an abrupt stop; Dawon, perhaps also feeling the same eerie, numbing tension, massaged my hand.

‘W-What is this?’

Even though Sung Yi-hwan slowly reached out to Lackey, Lackey couldn’t move.

It was only then that I realized that Sung Yi-hwan had launched a [Fear] attack. It’s a skill type that suppresses the movements of weaker opponents through things like shouting or glaring, and in Sung Yi-hwan’s case, his skill seemed to involve using vocal cords to create a loud noise, plunging his opponents into a [Fear State].

“Lackey!” I screamed.

At the same time, Seo Dawon moved. When Seo Dawon reached out his hand, a black hole appeared beneath the skeleton’s feet; like a chunk of ice, Lackey simply fell inside. Sung Yi-hwan had stolen Lackey away before we could grab it.

[….Clack Clack Clack!]

The next moment, Lackey appeared on top of my head. The skill must have created a wormhole–[Blink]. The problem, though, was that as soon as Lackey was teleported away, Sung Yi-hwan immediately turned around to attack Dawon.

Thump–! Thump–! Thump–!

Everywhere Sung Yi-hwan stomped his feet, the earth vibrated and shook. Looking for something to hold onto, I stuck close to a thick pillar nearby. The earthquake was severe enough for me to do that–such a formidable force.

‘Damn… Koo Hui-seo is…!’

While Sung Yi-hwan was clashing with Seo Dawon and the ground shook, books and bookshelves began to tumble down everywhere. And, to make matters worse, Koo Hui-seo was motionless before a toppling, huge cabinet.

Initially, I didn’t realize the motionless body was Koo Hui-seo until I saw the tentacle-like mass rising from his back. That was when I knew he was still alive.

However, Koo Hui-seo wouldn’t wake, even with all the noise surrounding; I measured the distance between Sung Yi-hwan and Koo Hui-seo.

At that moment, Dawon and I briefly locked eyes. Dawon-ie seemed to have a lot to say, but upon meeting my gaze, he subtly nodded. It was as if he understood that I was trying to rescue Koo Hui-seo.

And, from then on, Dawon’s attacks became incredibly fierce.

“[Inferno Circus].” Unlike before, he began to actively use his skills.

This time, his skill was reminiscent of a circus fire show. Eight round rings of fire were created; whenever Sung Yi-hwan approached, the rings unraveled and whipped at the werewolf. Moreover, once the fire ignited something, the flames seemed unquenchable, scorching the ground black. The embers didn’t die out.

After Sung Yi-wan was struck by the whip and observed his blackened chest, he refrained from approaching further. It was evident that Dawon's invoked skill inflicted some damage this time. Simultaneously, the two gradually moved away from where I and Koo Hui-seo were located.

'Is Dawon-ie leading him away?'

Though Dawon-ie stopped Sung Yi-hwan's attacks and gradually widened the distance between us, it didn't seem as if the Mage was overwhelmingly superior in this fight.

Whenever Sung Yi-hwan would punch forward with his skills, Dawon would step back and stop casting his own skills. It seemed that the Mage didn't have enough time to activate his own skills.

'First, I need to rescue Koo Hui-seo.'

Still, thanks to Dawon-ie's efforts to widen the gap, Lackey and I were able to approach Koo Hui-seo safely.

I was a little worried for him, because the guild leader had his neck held in a grasp earlier, but fortunately, as I got closer, I could see the mass of tentacles wriggling and writhing. It didn't seem like his life was in danger.

I shouted, "Hui-seo-ssi! Are you conscious?"

"Unnngh…" Koo Hui-seo opened his eyes, cold sweat running down his back, when I gripped and shook his tentacles. It seems that he had fainted while being strangled. "Lee-kyung-ssi… Hnngh."

Koo Hui-seo hugged me while he shed a few tears. Lackey tried to pull him off by tugging on the tentacles, but that was in vain.

With the ex-chimera in my arms, I tried to get out of there. "Wow… Hey, Koo Hui-seo-ssi. You're incredibly heavy!"

Unlike usual, Koo Hui-seo was so heavy that I could barely budge him one inch. He smirked and rubbed my face with his tentacles, "That's… because I was so surprised, and my tentacles all spilled out…"

“Then quickly put them back in!”

I hoisted Koo Hui-seo up, intending to quickly escape.

However… At that moment–

“It’s been a long while, Choi Lee-kyung.”

A familiar voice could be heard from behind the pillar beyond Koo Hui-seo. Then, I heard the sound of footsteps–sharp clacks against the floor.

When I raised my head, I felt a fear that strangled and suffocated me alongside an anger that burst forward, surging to my head.

* * *

“[Double Shot]!” Bang Eunji moved first. She shot two consecutive shots at the Holy Mother Statue’s heads, but both statues escaped the attacks and immediately rushed towards the grenadier.

Boom–!

Then, with their incredible weight, the statues jumped over Bang Eunji’s head. Eunji, of course, had already lifted her gun blade to block the way to her head; however, another statue was rushing in while her arms were preoccupied.

“[Chest Slash].”

Of course, Jung Garam didn’t simply stand by and observe. Bewilderingly, though, the statue ‘ignored’ Jung Garam’s attack and only

went after Bang Eunji.

After penetrating through the statues' 'heart,' Jung Garam felt a bit of regret. 'These bastards aren't human, right?'

In other words, unless the attack was powerful enough to immediately kill them, the Holy mother statues would continue to attack Bang Eunji with their intact and mobile hands.

Because Jung Garam and Bang Eunji were piloting [Dummies], they didn't feel pain; the issue, though, was where the hands were directed. The Goddess Statue was precisely targeting the grenadier's eyes.

Because the head was an important part of a Dummy, they'd be in trouble if it were to receive a strong impact. Bang Eunji pulled her body back as far as she could, preparing for the subsequent attack, but she couldn't help but clench her teeth as she anticipated a debilitating blow.

Slice–! [1]

However, when Bang Eunji opened her eyes again, she could see a fluttering string wrapped around the statue's body.

It was an Echo Blade. [2]

The statue continued to try and run towards Bang Eunji despite the razor-thin wound dripping blood…but it continued to be dragged backwards.

Unable to endure any longer, the Goddess Statue opened its mouth wide. It seemed to be gearing up to spray more sulfuric acid, and Bang Eunji was unable to move due to the weight of another statue atop her.

When the black mouth opened, and the bubbling liquid threatened to spurt out…

“Shut up.” Jung Garam drove his dagger into the chin of the statue from underneath.

The statue’s jaw closed; the acid that could not be spat out began to burn the statue’s throat. The white eyes began turning black as the statue twitched.

Only then was Bang Eunji able to smile and cut off the head of the statue that was weighing her down.

Buy Me a Coffee

Become a member!

TL: 3 guesses as to who the newcomer is, the first two guesses don’t count.

Also, my god, “I got so surprised all my tentacles spilled out” is such… a thing to say….
Only in NS, only in NS…

Footnotes

1. is like…the sound effect of something super rustly being sliced. Like paper or wheat.
2. I genuinely have no idea what's going on with Ragi's weapon tbh. I guess it's a stringly portion of his telepathic blades. Like a chain sword.

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